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**THROUGH TRAVELLED EYES:
REPRESENTATIONS OF SUBCONTINENTAL MIGRATION**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis uses the hostile reception of *The Satanic Verses*, the 'Rushdie Affair,' as a paradigm for studying immigrant writing from the Indian Subcontinent today. Looking at a selection of authors who specifically write on topics of migration, travel and migrant communities in the West, it considers the political implications of texts that represent marginalised immigrant communities, and inevitably offer them to the gaze of a mainstream readership, thus entering a peculiar power relationship. The introduction looks at the position of Edward Said as exiled intellectual and cultural critic, and the location of travel and migrant identity within postcolonial criticism. Chapter I discusses the reception of *The Satanic Verses*, particularly by the Muslim Asian communities in the UK, and the conflicting definitions of Indian and Muslim 'authenticity,' as well as political loyalty and accountability at its basis. Chapter II discusses the definitions of expatriation and immigration that occur in Bharati Mukherjee's writing, placing her within a tradition of criticism that has made use of such categorisation. It also looks at the class basis of her own categorisation, and the way this translates to functions of voice, vision and definition in her writing. Chapter III examines Hanif Kureishi's textual strategies for engaging with issues of representation and reception, by looking at his early plays, and focusing particularly on *My Beautiful Launderette* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*. It also emphasises Kureishi's particular position as a second-generation immigrant, and makes references to a number of other writers with comparable voices. Chapter IV discusses the influence of *Midnight's Children* on Indian literature in English, and its redefinition of postcolonial Indian selfhood with reference to alienation and minority status, and metaphorical and actual migration. It then examines instances of partition, travel and cosmopolitanism in the work of Amitav Ghosh, placing it within a

tradition that was inspired by Rushdie's novel. Chapter V focusses on the text of *The Satanic Verses* itself, examining its representations of postcolonial authorship, and its use of the figure of blasphemy as a new metaphor for the creation of postcolonial identity. The Afterword considers a number of works that were published after the Rushdie affair, including those by the authors in this thesis, and are coloured by the climate of political confrontation that it made inevitable.

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INTRODUCTION

It is, therefore, a source of great virtue for the practised mind to learn, bit by bit, first to change about invisible and transitory things, so that afterwards it may be able to leave them behind altogether. The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is as a foreign land. The tender soul has fixed his love on one spot in the world; the strong man has extended his love to all places; the perfect man has extinguished his.

Hugo of St Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony, as quoted in Erich Auerbach, as quoted in Edward Said.¹

Auerbach's exile in Istanbul during the second world war functions almost as a talisman in Edward Said's theorising of the exilic frame of mind. Repeatedly quoted and cited, Auerbach's classic, *Mimesis*, and the process of its production obviously strikes a chord with the Palestinian cultural critic in exile, even as he takes issue with some of the work's Eurocentric humanist assumptions - and Said is never less than ambivalent about the value of those, either.² The vastness of the achievement of the writing of *Mimesis* testifies to the status of exile as a productive sealing-off from the world, given bittersweet credit in both Said's and Auerbach's work. Unable to access the well-established and well-stocked libraries of his European capital, Auerbach had to make do with what he had in his possession, the classics. Isolating himself from the world war raging around his ears, he is reputed to have concentrated on writing the narrative of European realism across centuries. The location of his exile, Istanbul, is here irrelevant, and only becomes explicit in a throwaway sentence in his epilogue: 'I may also mention that the book was written during the war and at Istanbul, where the libraries are not well equipped for European studies' (p.557). Another aspect of the production of *Mimesis* for Said, however, is its implication of exile as creative self-deception: there is more than an implication in Said that this modern classic is a product of Auerbach's defiance and

denial of the development of Europe that excluded him as a Jew, and threw him outwith its limits, to the city of Istanbul, a city whose only meaning for Auerbach seems to have been the bitter fact of its not being Berlin. The figure of the aging exiled academic, writing a continuous account of European realist fiction, from within the confines of his personal library is, in this context, extremely poignant, and telling.

Said repeats Auerbach's chosen epigraph, quoting Hugo of St Victor, and reproduces a certain ideal of the exiled state of mind, in his notion of homelessness-as-home. In this model, presented as both an ideal and as self-deception, it is the very homelessness of the exile, however poignant, that is praised, the objectivity to be achieved after a quasi-religious process of purification from worldly allegiances that is presented as a goal, desirable, though it might be born out of necessity. Said's reading of the actual project of the exile, his own as well as Auerbach's, however, reveals anything but such disinterestedness.

Such a notion of exile-as-process, leading to an 'awareness of simultaneous dimensions' that is the basis of his 'contrapuntal' criticism ('The Mind of Winter,' p.55), is perhaps integral to reading Said's own work, and his status after *Orientalism*, as the elder statesman of colonial and postcolonial criticism, the master interpreter of texts of cultural encounters. The received, though not necessarily projected, image of Said as icon is cosmopolitan, urbane, cultured, in control and comfortable - not the nervous conditions habitually, since Fanon, attributed to the colonised. Said as suave cultural commentator appears as a voice to be trusted, having risen above, through sophisticated exile, the worldly allegiances that are seen as a barrier to be overcome in Auerbach's quotation. Said's attitude to his own exile, however, is consistent with his reading of the

production of *Mimesis*. In articles published variously in *Raritan*, *Critical Inquiry*, *New Left Review* and *Salmagundi*, where he allows himself to adopt a less than academic tone, Said expresses not only the bitterness and isolation of exile (most explicitly in 'The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile'), but also his awareness of the ambivalence of his position as one of the most prestigious academics in the world today, holding a well-paid chair in a major American University.

The presumed suave comfort and control is in fact variously an edgy defensiveness and a weary defiance in Said, and certainly much more subtly inflected than is usually perceived. One commentator on the complications of Said's self-perception is Aijaz Ahmad, the Marxist Indian critic who expresses both solidarity with and dissent from Said's work in his essay '*Orientalism* and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said.'³ In this lengthy and well-known critique of *Orientalism*, Ahmad problematises the position that Said is, or seems to be, writing from. This is not, surprisingly enough, a predictable critique of Said's prestigious position in a Western academic milieu, the implied privilege and ambivalence of his eminence as a world academic. What, to Ahmad, makes Said's work tenuous, is the ambivalence of his identity, the confusion of his self-positioning within that world.

Ahmad takes issue with the premise of *Orientalism*, presented by Said in his introduction: 'In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject.'⁴ In Aijaz's reading, Said's formulation of himself as Oriental subject is problematic to begin with, 'for anyone whose own cultural apparatus is so overwhelmingly European and who commands such an authoritative

presence in the American university' (p.171). But more importantly, he finds irony and inconsistency in this formulation:

Any careful reading of the *whole* of his work would show how strategically he deploys words like 'we' and 'us', to refer, in various contexts, to Palestinians, Third World intellectuals, academics in general, humanists, Arabs, Arab-Americans, and the American citizenry at large (p.171).

It is interesting here to examine Ahmad's own assumptions and assertions in criticising Said. Ahmad begins his article with an expression of solidarity with Said and his 'beleaguered location in the midst of imperial America. For Edward Said is not only a cultural critic, he is also a Palestinian' (p.160). He then goes on to register his opinion that once 'the dust of the current literary debates settles, Said's most enduring contribution will be seen as residing neither in *Orientalism*, which is a deeply flawed book, nor in the literary essays which have followed in its wake, but in his work on the Palestine issue' (pp.16-161). Though his critique of *Orientalism* is well-supported, it is difficult to avoid the impression that at least part of Ahmad's problem with *Orientalism* arises from the fact that he is more comfortable with and approving of Said's work *as a Palestinian*, than as a post-colonial exile whose self-positioning has been complicated by such exile, and who is now ambivalent enough to posit his speaking voice on a variety of seemingly contradictory poses: as a Palestinian speaking against American imperialism; as a postcolonial subject expressing solidarity with other intellectuals in exile; and sometimes as a Western/American academic appealing to fellow academics to alter the canon, or to introduce new ways of representing the world, both in his political and his academic work.

The issue of cosmopolitanism, particularly in the case of postcolonial critics - and writers - working within Western circles, is a contentious one. There is a tendency to categorise, on the part of both critics and practitioners, the types of exile and migration - according to frame of mind and vision, as in the case of Hugo of St Victor, and according to class and political affiliation, in the work of more than one contemporary postcolonial critic. It is perhaps possible, though, to see reflections in these categories more of the critic/author's own self-positioning than anything else. A symptomatic clash of categorisation takes place in an interview included in Sarah Harasym's *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, a collection devoted to the work of Gayatri Spivak. The three Indian academics interviewing Spivak, teaching back in India for a year, start with an assumption, as Indian intellectuals, of their difference from Spivak, a non-resident Indian, and also assume that Spivak does the same: 'There are several questions that arise out of the way you perceive yourself ('The post-colonial diasporic Indian who seeks to decolonize the mind'), and the way you constitute us (for convenience, 'native' intellectuals).' Spivak counters by arguing against this division, and by emphasising their similarity through reference to another category: 'I thought I constituted you, equally with the diasporic Indian, as a post-colonial intellectual.'⁵ The spectre of that initial distinction, however, colours the tone of the interview. Similar variations of self-positioning are evidenced in Ahmad's discomfort with Said's postcoloniality as a fragmented and ambivalent self, Rushdie's defensive posture that British Asians share a similarly fragmented vision, 'whether writers or not,' and Mukherjee's sharp distinction between her past incarnation as a superior, ironic expatriate, and her new self-image as a 'chameleon-skinned' immigrant who can choose her material 'up and down the social ladder.'⁶

Abdul JanMohamed, in his spectacularly titled article 'Worldliness-without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual' names two new categories of 'border intellectuals... located between two (or more) groups or cultures,' which he defines in opposition 'based on the *intentionality of their intellectual orientation*' (JanMohamed's italics, p.97):

The *syncretic intellectual*, more "at home" in both cultures than his or her specular counterpart, is able to combine elements of the two cultures in order to articulate new syncretic forms and experiences... By contrast, the *specular border intellectual*, while perhaps equally familiar with two cultures, finds himself or herself unable or unwilling to be "at home" in these societies. Caught between several cultures or groups, none of which are deemed sufficiently enabling or productive, the specular intellectual subjects the cultures to analytic scrutiny rather than combining them; he or she utilizes his or her interstitial cultural space as a vantage point from which to define, implicitly or explicitly, other, utopian possibilities of group formation (my italics).⁷

There is no mistaking JanMohamed's preferred mode of 'border intellectual' here. Whether or not one wishes to adopt this sharp distinction between the urge to combine and harmonise as opposed to the inability to feel at home in any culture, however, one is struck by JanMohamed's allocation of Rushdie and Achebe firmly to the first group, and Said to the second. As with most strictly conceived categorisations of exile and migration, it is surely possible to read most critics/writers into either position. Rushdie, for example, displays more than a little anxiety about his in-betweenness, and foregrounds his refusal of choice, as much as his cultural eclecticism; in his fiction and his more journalistic work. The ambivalence is doubtless shared by his readers: JanMohamed bases his categorisation on the observation that Rushdie's "'English" novels are often articulated in Urdu syntax' (p.97). To one reader, Rushdie has thrown his lot in with the West, as he has stayed on and functions in its systems, to another, he is unquestionably otherwise, judging from the subject matter of his fiction. His own

categorisation of types of minority imagination in 'Imaginary Homelands' is perhaps similar to JanMohamed's formulation of the syncretic and the specular. (Rushdie contrasts these utterances by two black American writers, Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison: 'black and white Americans were engaged in a war over the nature of reality. Their descriptions were incompatible' (p.13), as opposed to 'I was taken very early, with a passion to link all I loved within the negro community and all those things I felt in the world which lay beyond' (p.20)). The repeated journeys back and forth between India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children*, between Bombay and London in *The Satanic Verses*, and between even more convoluted multiple locations in *The Moor's Last Sigh* surely testify to a sense of identity more uncomfortably constructed, and more elusive than is suggested by the notion of being 'at home' in two harmonised cultures.⁸

In 'Imaginary Homelands,' Rushdie describes his cultural situation as an Indian in England, as being both an insider and an outsider, and employs metaphors of in-betweenness: 'Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools' (p.15). This, he argues, gives the migrant a double perspective, a 'stereoscopic vision' which replaces any pretence at 'whole sight' (p.19). Straddling two chairs, or falling between two stools, are commonplace figures of speech used for defining migrancy. These reflections of common wisdom, however, are arguably both unsatisfactory in their schematic and static representation of migrancy and the exilic frame of mind. This is where JanMohamed's writing on the subject of what he terms 'specular border intellectuals' and the problem of cosmopolitanism goes beyond convention. In his model there is a move away from such static images of migrant vision, an emphasis on the continuity of movement, and its intentionality: what characterises an intellectual from the post-colonial periphery who has travelled to the metropolitan centre

is not necessarily a broadening of horizons allowing the intellectual's vision to encompass and rise towards scholarly objectivity, or simply to occupy an interstitial space, but the fact that he or she has to continually repeat the border crossing and mental repositioning, acting, at every turn, as a cultural translator, albeit for different audiences. JanMohamed's specular intellectual crosses cultural as well as geographic borders, where he or she is obliged to view one side from the point of view of the other, even if the aim is to subvert such vision. In this formulation, cosmopolitanism is no longer a neutral word, a vision of synthesising the best of two worlds, but a condition of constant border-crossing and repositioning, which JanMohamed illustrates by using the example of Edward Said:

Said's relation to them [intellectuals who cross borders in various ways: most notably T.E. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Eric Auerbach, and Louis Massignon] is specular because, from his very different location on the same border between European and non-European cultures, he faces these Western intellectuals across that border, so to speak, and crosses over into the West only to recross the border with them in order to map the politics of their forays into other cultures. Thus Said's commentaries on these individuals constitute a series of specular crossing and recrossing of cultural borders (p.98).

It is arguable, if we think of JanMohamed's perceptive analysis of the making of *Orientalism*, that Said's self-confessed project to 'inventory the traces' upon himself as Oriental subject-cum-Western academic inevitably involves the kind of slippage of pronouns observed by Ahmad. Said as commentator is perhaps able to act out and signpost such 'specular crossing and recrossing' in ways more explicit than a writer of fiction. A similar dynamic, however, is easily discernible in Rushdie's fiction, and the fiction of the Indian diaspora today.

Such a shifting point of view and its political ambivalences are, in fact, issues that need to be dealt with by a travelling or migrating writer. For all her protestations of affinity with the Indian communities in America from the most privileged to the voiceless underclass, Bharati Mukherjee's short stories are most interesting when identification and affinity are questioned. Though Mukherjee has written a number of stories which use first-person narratives of underprivileged immigrants, not least her novel, *Jasmine*, the entirety of her work displays a much more complicated and politically complex attitude towards point of view.⁹ Her stories employ not just immigrants looking at America, but Americans of various description looking at immigrants as well. The 'I' of the stories in *Middleman and Other Stories* and in *Darkness* shifts variously between an Indian mature student in America noticing her husband's provincial Indian gaucheness when he visits her; an Italian-American woman watching the way her Afghani refugee lover stands out at a thanksgiving dinner with her family; and Vietnam veteran Americans through whose resentful eyes Mukherjee scrutinises her one-time compatriots.¹⁰ An American citizen, Mukherjee defines herself as an American writer, and she places herself in a distinct category from Indian writers in English. Her Indian-American identity, however, can only be defined through nervous, shifting means and allegiances.

The attractive suppositions about exile and writing, of an enlargement of world-view, of the enabling objectivity of the vision of the outsider, still carry a certain weight. Such assumptions tend, however, to be questioned in today's political climate and its difference-sensitive fiction, even if such fiction seems on the surface to advertise notions of comfortable internationalism, and postcolonial writers who give the impression of a certain cosmopolitan versatility are by no means a minority. Among the writers that will be mentioned in this thesis, Shashi Tharoor works for the UN, most recently holding

down a diplomatic post in Bosnia, Amitav Ghosh teaches anthropology in Delhi, and writes travel features for *Granta*, including pieces on America and Cambodia, and Vikram Seth's internationalism is remarkable by any standards.

It is perhaps not surprising that in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair, Vikram Seth became the new favourite, praised for being able to write equally well about California or Delhi, suave and metropolitan, and not confrontational and politically risky in the way Rushdie had proved to be even before the 'Affair.' Seth writes with an impressive technical bravado, he can compose a novel written in Pushkin stanzas and translate Chinese poetry, his work includes travel writing, contributions to a book of children's poetry, as well as an attempt at a recreation of the nineteenth century genre of the family saga in several volumes.

The book that first made his name, Seth's *The Golden Gate* advertises its internationality just as much as it does its Americanness.¹¹ The yuppie cast of characters dwell on the homegrown American conflicts between WASP, Jew and Japanese in an affluent tale of sexual, political, environmental and artistic morality. The sense of comfort and confidence in the book is striking, not only in its chosen genre of verse novel, but in the audacity of this Indian writer, a graduate student in San Francisco at the time, daring to write what Gore Vidal has described as 'the great Californian novel' on the dust jacket of the hardback edition. The ostensible position that this cosmopolitan work insists on is the comfort of imaginative access. Having left his native India, it is possible to argue, Seth's imagination does not dwell on his foreignness, but achieves the ideal of Hugo of St Victor as quoted in Auerbach and Said, of a radical rootlessness that affords access to an international cultural field, where one can pick any culture for imaginative inquiry.

This is dissimilar to writing by figures such as Graham Greene or Somerset Maugham, who along with Conrad, can be accused, in Chinua Achebe's well-known words, of using third-world locations as 'setting and back drop' to a European drama, which, Achebe argues, 'eliminates the African as human factor' in *Heart of Darkness*.¹² Seth's Indianness is marginal to his American text in more ways than one - the only, easily missed Indian character appears, a social outcast, in a house-warming party:

While bowed down with the gray futility
Of his dank thesis, Kim Tarvesh
Ogles convexities of flesh
And maximises his utility
By drowning in his chilled chablis
His economics PhD (p.78).

One would not want to read too much into Vikram Seth's self-effacing private joke in presenting this anagram for himself as the proverbial wallflower - after all, the writer of these lines was creating something much more flamboyant than a dank and futile PhD. It is however arguable that the extravagant internationalism that allowed Seth such comfortable imaginative access to Chinese poetry as well as the world of privileged America, did not naturally lead to a self-portrayal as a suave cosmopolitan. His self-portrait remains on the side-lines, comically uncomfortable, 'ogling' the convexities of Californian flesh, in the margins of his own cosmopolitan writing. Similarly, their mastery of the English language might afford postcolonial writers access to the world stage, but it emphasises their minority status as well.

The position of the migrant intellectual/writer is one of conflicts. If a postcolonial writer writing in English chooses to foreground the notion of migrancy in fiction, then there are unavoidable Western fictional and political antecedents that need to be dealt with. Exiles

figure prominently in the work and the biography of writers of modernist fiction, especially Joyce, already a powerful model for contemporary writing. Conrad's parable of colonialism in *Heart of Darkness* is, for many African writers, a direct source that needs to be subverted and reversed: in Tayeb Salih's reversal of Conrad's narrative pattern, *Season of Migration to the North*, themes of quest and voyage into the unknown are prevalent, already metaphoric of the condition of the colonial subject.¹³ Travel writing, anthropology and other research into the Orient have been discussed by Said in *Orientalism*, and shown to be complicit in projects of colonialism. This awareness necessarily haunts the contemporary travel writer, especially a postcolonial one.

The application of the premises of Orientalism to the situation of the postcolonial intellectual in the West is inescapable: when a postcolonial writer travels or migrates to the West, and writes about his or her own country of origin, he or she is seen to be entering a peculiar power relationship by representing the colonised to the coloniser. Naively defined, the role is that of a cultural translator, a mediator - a position wryly criticised by Kwame Anthony Appiah:

Perhaps the predicament of the postcolonial intellectual is simply that *as* intellectuals - a category instituted in black Africa by colonialism - we are, indeed, always at the risk of becoming otherness machines, with the manufacture of alterity as our principal role. Our only distinction in the world of texts to which we are latecomers is that we can mediate it to our fellows. This is especially true when postcolonial meets postmodern; for what the postmodern reader seems to demand of Africa is all too close to what modernism - in the form of the postimpressionists - demanded of it.¹⁴

This is an accusation of Orientalism, implying that the writer of postmodernism/postcolonialism is entering into an act of cultural ransacking similar to the one of which colonialism was guilty. Many postcolonial and minority writers have, in fact,

been accused of 'a new Orientalism:' the Rushdie affair speaks for itself; Hanif Kureishi faced criticism after *My Beautiful Launderette* for creating ruthless Pakistani businessmen and drug-smugglers, and the Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston, after the publication of *The Woman Warrior*, was condemned by some for perpetuating the myths of 'the yellow peril' and of 'the inscrutable Chinese' in an autobiographical representation of a girl facing racist and sexist prejudice in a Chinese-American environment.¹⁵ Are these acts of cultural translation and mediation, benign and welcome gifts of a voice to the voiceless, or unwelcome exercises of power?

Rushdie states in 'Imaginary Homelands' that 'Western writers have always felt free to be eclectic in their selection of theme, setting, form... I am sure we must grant ourselves equal freedom' (p.20). However, the militant optimism of this statement of intent ignores the presence of a considerable bulk of scholarship critiquing just such eclecticism on the part of the Western writer, whether colonial or contemporary, as exemplified by Appiah's critique of an unquestioned link between postmodern and postcolonial theories of writing. Such comfortable selectivity is not available to an art of the sort practised by Rushdie, however eclectic his work might be, his selectivity is 'neurasthenic,' not consumerist, not comfortable, not organic.¹⁶

The issue of authorial responsibility in the writing of postcolonial migration is bound up inextricably with the notion of cultural translation - who is doing the translating, and why? What does the choice of subject matter signify? Who are the intended and the actual audiences? A comparable list of questions is articulated by Edward Said in 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community:'

Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These, it seems to me, are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making for a politics of interpretation.¹⁷

The awareness of such specific political positionality necessitates an engagement with the issue of potential readerships, and the response of such readers. Even a writer like Hanif Kureishi, whose instincts reject the obligation to act as a 'public relations officer' for 'his people,'¹⁸ to be a 'professional Pakistani' (*My Beautiful Launderette*, p.82), finds himself engaging with the issue in his texts, satirising a stereotyped Western/British/mainstream reading as well as a black/minority/politically correct one.

The concept of representation in fiction necessarily involves several contentious issues: representation in political terms, assuming that the writer is 'speaking for' the migrant community he is writing of; 'representativeness,' implying an identification that would enable the writer to give voice to the community unambiguously; and of course, the necessary consideration of the act of fictional representation in its social context, especially its relationship with its audience. How unified or divided is the audience for a postcolonial, especially migrant text, and what does this entail even at the level of basic communication - from the use of non-English words, idioms, to cultural, political, religious references and literary antecedents? Does the text need to code itself for multiple audiences, and deal with the political problems of privileging one over the other? But the most problematic issue, perhaps, is the power relationship that is seen to be constructed by such a text's position as 'native informant,' translating the postcolonial culture of origin to the judgmental gaze of a Western readership.¹⁹

To define this specific relationship, postcolonial criticism borrows terminology from sources as various as anthropology and law: native informant, cultural translation, witness, mediator are all words that have found currency in criticism. Anthropological terminology, reminiscent of the writers of Orientalism, is perhaps the most evocative in this context. Such jargon is now in common usage in discussions of postcolonial writing, and its ironic use constitutes a critique of earlier travel writing that perhaps imagined the relationship between subject, observer and audience to be less politically ambivalent. The postcolonial writer does not have such luxury: flitting between the roles of anthropological subject, native informant, and anthropologist, variously fulfilling roles of observing, being observed, and providing material for such observation. This multiple identification, and the nervousness that the audience might privilege one at the expense of the other, lends a necessary ambivalence to the writing. Amitav Ghosh's *In An Antique Land*, mixing the genres of autobiography, travel writing and anthropological research, foregrounds such an understanding of the intentionality and the complicity of the postcolonial, travelling writer.

The impossible task to 'inventory the traces' on the postcolonial subject becomes surely more involved when the subject in question has migrated. Many critics do include the study of migrancy as a legitimate aspect of the reality of postcoloniality today. For example, in Said's formulation the 'voyage in' (from the periphery to the centre) is a continuation of the project of decolonisation, and the work of third world intellectuals in the West 'is not simply the work of individuals, but mainly an extension into the metropolis of large-scale mass movements.'²⁰ He states categorically in 'Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture' that 'the contest over decolonization has moved from the peripheries to the center' (p.36). It is a truism that decolonisation cannot be seen to evolve naturally from the achievement of independence, but requires an alteration of the systems of power that still persist politically,

economically and intellectually. However, the location of migrancy, migrant intellectuals, and of immigrant writing in this process must be more contentious than is suggested by Said's optimistic statement.

For many, like Rushdie, migrancy has a central position: quite apart from the importance of the fact of mass-migration as a defining political feature of this century, it also functions as a defining metaphor for postcoloniality. In his work, the plight of migrants in London proper always echoes the originating conflict of the colonial past. The 'empire writes back,' in his own memorable phrase, from London as well as from Bombay and Delhi, creating new ways of being Indian, as much as it does new ways of being British. This is akin to Said's position, where, ideally, the 'voyage in' will be followed by the 'voyage out', typified perhaps by his fidelity to the cause of creating a Palestinian homeland, emphasising his status as exile. Unlike Said, Rushdie's own location in London is not necessitated by the statelessness of exile. However, *The Satanic Verses* does have a similar impetus, and ends its story of migration, dislocation and fragmentation of identity with a sentimental resolution of homecoming.

There are possible paradoxes in this approach. For Spivak, for example, the notion of the 'empire writing back' entails a dissolution of the projects of independence and decolonisation, where these originate, in the Third World. In her vision, the writers whose work is seen to exemplify the empire writing back are engaging in an insular phenomenon, writing and being read in the metropolis, and playing into the easy option of 'shrinking the entire world into a migrant internationality in the Eurocentric North.'²¹ Whatever the importance of the projects of hybridity and multiculturalism in the metropolitan West, their

success is not synonymous with decolonisation, overshadowing the use of migrancy as a metaphor, or as a defining feature of postcoloniality, let alone of postmodernism.

The perpetual movement between boundaries, and the consciousness of the direction or the intentionality of such movement, as suggested by JanMohamed, or the 'awareness of simultaneous dimensions' that Said's contrapuntal criticism advocates, may be viable stances for the migrant intellectual: cosmopolitanism not as neutrality and comfort but a deliberate nervousness and constant repositioning. Such conceptual border-crossing and repositioning do in fact find parallels in the literature of migrancy in their physical counterparts: exile, expatriation, migration, travel, nuances of homecoming and leavetaking. This does, however, have elitist implications, and does not necessarily cohere with the existence of immigrant communities in the West, whether these be real or imagined. What do cosmopolitanism and hybridity mean in their terms, in the politics of race relations and the pressure to assimilate?

The place of migrancy in postcolonial theory is ambiguous, though at the same time peculiarly central. It is surely not a coincidence that many practitioners of such criticism are based in the West. One certainly has to take into account the realities of academic ambition and validation which more often than not are involved in the choice to migrate: a brand of academic exile unlike those of Auerbach and Said, but no less valid for that. Such a brain-drain is a very particular type of migration, and its place in the theorising of the postcolonial is often coupled with the mass migration of Third World and postcolonial peoples to the North and the West, but it is important to emphasise that the two are in no way synonymous. Critics as various as Aijaz Ahmad, Benita Parry, Abdul JanMohamed and Said himself draw distinctions between the immigrant and the exile in class terms. Especially in the Asian

community in Britain, distinct waves of population movement that differ in size and in kind are historically documented. Class distinctions, and the question of bourgeois complicity with the coloniser are already touchy subjects. Uma Parameswaran, for example, in her discussion of expatriate writing, argues that this may not be a new category at all, but simply an extension of what may be termed 'native-aliens' - the class of Indians who were 'anglicized in their social, behavioural and educational patterns,' who did, in fact, then become the new Indian ruling class.²² Rushdie's *Midnight Children* does rely on such an identification of groups of privilege: a novel written by a migrant author in English, it nevertheless finds self-reflexivity in the figure of an upper-class Muslim narrator, who admits self-consciousness about his speaking voice of 'pure' Urdu. This conjunction of class privilege and minority status then found its way into a proliferation of novels inspired by Rushdie's self-conscious model.

With migration, the stresses and strains of this past of colonial class differential are perhaps carried over to the metropolitan location. In the case of immigrant writers, Spivak's question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' applies to the writer's relationship not only with the masses of the Indian subcontinent but the voiceless bulk of the subcontinental immigrants in Britain (or in the States) as well, the so-called elusive Asian community about which claims are made and hearts are broken.²³ Benita Parry is one critic among many who draws distinctions, in discussing Said's position as post-colonial critic, between mass diaspora and intellectual brain-drain, a 'chasm' of which Said is 'more aware than most.'²⁴ Distinctions between exiles, emigres, scholars, anthropologists, tourists and travellers, and the frames of mind they engender, have been traditionally finely drawn. However, the newly strained relationship between the representer and the represented in the fiction of migration is now possibly more significant and more strained than any of these. The migrant intellectual, perhaps

specifically the writer, has necessarily become an aloof and suspect figure after *The Satanic Verses* affair. It is in this context, in fact, that the politics of the writing and reception of *The Satanic Verses*, the Rushdie affair, can be cited as a paradigm for immigrant writing today.

NOTES

1. Edward Said, 'The Mind of Winter: Reflections on Life in Exile,' *Harper's* 269 (September 1984), pp.49-55 (p.55). Further references are in the text.
2. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). Further references are in the text. For sample discussions of Auerbach's status in Said's critical work, see David Damrosch, 'Auerbach in Exile,' *Comparative Literature* 47, no 2 (Spring 1995), pp.97-117; Aijaz Ahmad, 'Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Metropolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said,' in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1994), pp.159-219; Abdul R. JanMohamed, 'Worldliness-without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual,' in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.96-143; and Charles Forsdick, 'Edward Said After Theory: the Limits of Counterpoint,' unpublished paper presented at the *Post-Theory* Conference, University of Glasgow, June 1996.
3. Aijaz Ahmad, 'Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said,' in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (New York: Verso, 1994), pp.159-219. Further references are in the text.
4. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.25.
5. Rashmi Bhatnagar, Lola Chatterjee and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan, 'The Post-Colonial Critic,' in Sarah Harasym, ed., *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues - Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.67-74 (p.67).
6. Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.9-21 (p.13), and Bharati Mukherjee, 'Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!' *New York Times Book Review*, 28 Aug 1988, pp.1 and 28-9 (p.29).
7. Abdul JanMohamed, 'Worldliness-without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual,' in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.96-143 (p.97). Further references are in the text.
8. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982), *The Satanic Verses* (New York and London: Viking/Penguin, 1988), and *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995).
9. Bharati Mukherjee, *Jasmine* (London: Virago, 1991).
10. Bharati Mukherjee, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (New York: Ballantine, 1988), and *Darkness* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1985).
11. Vikram Seth, *The Golden Gate* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986). Further references are in the text.
12. Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*,' in *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays 1965-1987* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1988), pp.1-13 (p.8).

13. Tayeb Saleh, *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies (Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1991).
14. Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?' *Critical Inquiry* 17, 2 (Winter 1991), pp.336-57 (p.356).
15. Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Launderette and the Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), and Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (London: Pan, 1977).
16. The term is Sara Suleri's: 'The more such a text as *Shame* represses and censors its own ambivalence toward the location of its audience, the more likely it will be to seclude itself in a nervous advertisement of self-conscious ideological rectitude. To write from the pale of oppression becomes necessary solace for a writing made jumpy by its own relation to oppressiveness: hence the neurasthenic idiom of novels like *Shame*.' ('Salman Rushdie: Embodiments of Blasphemy, Censorships of Shame,' in *The Rhetoric of English India* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp.174-206 (pp.174-5)).
17. Edward Said, 'Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies and Community,' *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1982), pp.1-26 (p.1).
18. Hanif Kureishi, 'Some Time with Stephen: A Diary,' in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid: The Script and The Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp.61-127 (p.65).
19. Gayatri Spivak argues that Bharati Mukherjee's heroines are 'privileged native informants of liberal third worldist feminism,' in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.256.
20. Edward Said, 'Third World Intellectuals and Metropolitan Culture,' *Raritan* IX, 3 (Winter 1990), pp.29-50 (p.36). Further references are in the text.
21. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Narratives of Multiculturalism,' lecture given at the Glasgow School of Art, 1995.
22. Uma Parameswaran, 'What Price Expatriation,' in Alastair Niven, ed., *Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation* (Brussels: M. Didier, 1976), pp.41-52 (p.42).
23. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.24-8.
24. Benita Parry, 'Overlapping Territories, Intertwined Histories: Edward Said's Postcolonial Cosmopolitanism,' in Michael Sprinker, ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp.19-47 (p.20).

CHAPTER I: IMMIGRANT WRITER, IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY:

THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR

Salman Rushdie has always described himself as an immigrant writer, even before his fiction started dealing with the specific experience of his own immigration, the experience and conflicts of being an Asian immigrant in Britain, which he addressed for the first time in *The Satanic Verses*.¹ Rushdie himself and critics of his work alike have examined his earlier novels, *Grimus*, *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, in terms of his immigration, as works written with a 'migrant's vision.'² He has elaborated on his affiliation with the experience and the vision of immigration in various articles: 'Imaginary Homelands' alternately titled 'An Indian Writer in England;' his introduction to *Home Front*; 'The New Empire Within Britain,' and his introduction to Günter Grass's *Writing and Politics* among them.³ Though *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* aroused some hostility, especially of the official kind in India and Pakistan respectively, and there was some unease about Rushdie's right to the authoritative role he seemed to have assumed, it was ironically when he explicitly wrote about the immigrant communities whose 'vision' he had claimed to share in his earlier fiction, that real hostility erupted. Far from sharing his vision, the immigrant, specifically Muslim community in Britain violently rejected any claim Rushdie had of 'speaking for' or expressing their vision of themselves. He was cast variously in the role of someone ignorant of the issues concerning 'real' Muslim immigrants, or as a traitor who abused his intimate knowledge to ingratiate himself with the Western establishment by maligning his own community to the enemy, for profit. Ali Mazrui describes the popular perception of the purpose of *The Satanic Verses* in his article 'The Moral Dilemma of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*' in the following words:

This particular writer seems to have launched an attack against it [the Koran]. What is more, he has done it in a manner which is not to reform Islam from within, but to be lionized by critics of Islam, and sometimes by enemies of Islam. And he has also done it in a manner which earns him a lot of money.⁴

In his book *Be Careful with Mohammad: The Salman Rushdie Affair*, Shabbir Akhtar, a vociferous member of the Bradford Council of Mosques, repeatedly stresses the point that Rushdie is not a believer, therefore not a 'real' and 'authentic' Muslim, and thus any position he has on Islam or immigrant Muslims is bound to be by definition untenable.⁵

In a newspaper article he wrote some time later, in response to the publication of Rushdie's 'In Good Faith,' Akhtar generalises his point and his implicit hostility to embrace other non-believing British writers and intellectuals of a Muslim background:⁶

Rushdie claims that there is a "growing number of Muslim readers, writers and scholars" who are beginning to speak in his defence. I cannot think of any authentic Muslim who would defend Rushdie's book. (And Tariq Ali, Hanif Kureishi and the champagne socialists are not believers).⁷

What Shabbir Akhtar is doing here is driving a radical intellectual and emotional wedge between the bulk of the immigrant intellectuals and writers in Britain, whom he dismisses as 'champagne socialists,' and the communities which concern them, and some would like to argue, that they belong to. Akhtar sees in Rushdie's writing about Islam and Muslims (and by implication those of Tariq Ali, Hanif Kureishi and many more) not only 'inauthenticity' as they are not believing Muslims, but also maliciousness of purpose:

I believe that *The Satanic Verses* is a calculated attempt to vilify and slander Mohammed... This is not to deny his right to explore, in fiction, the great parameters of life, sexuality, mortality and the existence (or non-existence) of deity. But Muslims must and do take issue with his choice of idiom, and the temper it serves (p.19).

The alleged malignity of Rushdie's motives in writing about Islam in the way he did in *The Satanic Verses* has been the subject of much writing on 'the Rushdie affair.' Inauthenticity and extreme alienation were charges levelled against the Westernised Third World intellectual class, of which Rushdie was made a symbol, even a scapegoat, in much the same way, perhaps, that Nirad Chaudhuri and V.S. Naipaul had been before him. Any attempt to express an opinion on the world which he was perceived to have abandoned was seen as a transgression. His very right, as well as his ability, to write about a group to which he had made himself an outsider, who, in Shabbir Akhtar's words, 'writes with all the knowledge of an insider,' was challenged. The accusations in Akhtar's article are perhaps paradoxical: Rushdie is again being accused of inauthenticity, but he is also being condemned for his status as an 'insider,' and therefore being in possession of privileged information that he ought to have kept sacred. This is, perhaps, a possible definition for blasphemy: maliciousness of purpose combined with intimate betrayal.

In his book *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam*, Malise Ruthven draws attention to the sexual imagery used to describe the particular nature of the offence Rushdie committed by his treatment of Islam in *The Satanic Verses*.⁸ He quotes one man saying that 'what he has written is far worse to Muslims than if he had raped one's own daughter... It's like a knife being dug into you - or being raped yourself' (p.29), and also relates an anecdote included in a public address by Ali Mazrui, a particularly striking analogy made by a Pakistani acquaintance: 'It's as if Rushdie had composed a brilliant poem about the private parts of his parents, and then gone to the market-place to recite the poem to the applause of strangers, who invariably laughed at the jokes he cracks about his parents' genitalia - and he's taking money for doing it' (See endnote 8).

Ruthven finds the sexual imagery 'significant, revealing the essential connection between faith and purity' (p.29). In his chapter titled 'Honour and Shame' he further examines the Muslim sensibility concerning faith and sexuality as they converge in the mythicised personality of the prophet and the 'sacral space Mohammad occupies in Muslim feeling and affection' (p.31). In entering this space, Rushdie commits a violation so severe that it is perceived as an offence 'worse than rape' (p.31). Though faith and sexual purity often are conjoined, (and not exclusively in Islam) - which is why the passages in *The Satanic Verses* that connect the prophet in whatever direct or indirect ways to sexual vulgarity and licentiousness caused the most offence - what distinguishes the sexual imagery in these quotations is their familial nature: the rape of a daughter, the display and mockery of a parent's genitals. The violence and transgressiveness of the crime was accentuated by the fact that it is at the same time a betrayal of family, a betrayal of intimacy. The privacy and sacredness of the family displayed and demeaned for the benefit of the 'market place,' with all its associations of materialism and of amorality. The 'brilliant poem,' or the brilliant book, thus becomes a token of incestuous exploitation, its reading in the market place, or its publication, for the malicious satisfaction of hostile strangers an expression simultaneously of intimacy and alienation, for both of which Salman Rushdie, and in his image the westernised ex-third world writer, the immigrant intellectual, faces rejection and condemnation by the more conservative factions of the community.

This simultaneity of intimacy and alienation in the relationship of the immigrant writer to his subject matter, and the dangers of this peculiar relationship are not new themes to readers of Rushdie's work. His fiction is always conscious of the relationship of the narrator and the narratee and of the author's assumption of the power of representation,

through the act of writing, over people and subjects who may wish to reject such acts of representation. In *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie created a model of authorial responsibility in Saleem's relationship with Padma, his immediate audience, to whom he dictates the history of India as he perceives it, with an inflated view of his centrality, and from a particular perspective, as the mission-school educated son of a well-to-do Muslim family living in the cocoon of their hillock-top mansion overlooking Bombay. Saleem is not only unrepresentative, but his point of view is frequently a distortion born out of his self-delusion. In characteristic self-reflexive passages, Rushdie points the finger of blame at himself, as the post-colonial immigrant writer, re-telling the history of independent India from his vantage point in England, in a western medium, for consumption by a largely English audience.

Rushdie writes out the implications of this authorial model in explicit passages of authorial intervention in *Shame*, where he defines the terms of his authorship, of his relationship with the subject matter - the history of Pakistan - in response to imagined, and in the light of recent events, even prophetic, accusations hurled at him by a constructed textual censor. Sara Suleri in *The Rhetoric of English India* discusses the use of this image of censorship in the text as a postcolonial tactic.⁹ The postcolonial writer in English, self-conscious of his position of power as a possible exploiter, writes a censor into the text. This is specifically a Pakistani censor in this case, ironically the subject of this novel, but not its main audience. This strategy helps shift the position of power, showing the writer as vulnerable, a victim of attack, in order to overcome the 'shame' of his authorial position, defending the postcolonial author's licence to write, by representing himself as a victim of censorship.¹⁰

But however much he may interrogate his licence to write and 'give voice and fictional flesh to the immigrant culture,' Rushdie has always been adamant about his championing of what he called the 'migrant's point of view,' a view in which he saw himself and the immigrant community unified.¹¹ After the eruption of the Rushdie affair, when the extent of his disunity from the British immigrant community seemed startlingly evident, he wrote the following words of self-defence in 'In Good Faith:'

The point of view from which I have, all my life, attempted this process of literary renewal is the result not of the self-hating, deracinated Uncle-Tomism of which some have accused me, but precisely of my determination to create a literary language and literary forms in which the experience of formerly colonized, still-disadvantaged peoples might find full expression. If *The Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant's eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis... that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity (pp.393-4).

This dream of a unified vision recurs in all of Rushdie's essays on immigration and immigrant literature, which he more often than not discusses together, in contrast with the images of disunity he presents in his fiction: in the Saleem/Shiva and Saleem/Padma dichotomies in *Midnight's Children*, and in the acerbic dialogue between himself as the censored author and his orthodox reader in *Shame*. Outside his fiction, both in the literary articles expounding his theories of immigrant writing, and in his more polemical writing on race relations, Rushdie assumes the stance of a confident spokesperson for the community.

Salman Rushdie has been the most prominent voice in immigrant writing for some years: he has always defined himself and his writing in terms relating to his migrancy, expounding his own notion of the 'migrant' in his fiction as well as in several articles on the subject of immigration, in which he enthusiastically declares his belief in the notion

of the 'migrant' as the 'central or defining figure of the twentieth century' (Grass, p.x) and migration as 'one of the richest metaphors of our age' (Grass, p.xii). He develops a sophisticated theory of the 'immigrant condition' and of 'immigrant writing,' offering himself and his writing as illustrations of what he argues is a causal relationship between a social position (migrancy) and an aesthetic orientation (modernism, the 'fragmented' memory and vision which he sees as the inevitable result of an immigrant vision of the world):

Those of us who have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties, have perhaps had modernism forced upon us. We can't lay claim to Olympus, and are thus released to describe our worlds in the way in which all of us, *whether writers or not*, perceive them from day to day (my italics).¹²

This is an extract from 'Imaginary Homelands,' the article in which Rushdie elaborates on the idea of the universality and relevance of the immigrant experience in the contemporary world, and its consequent link with the dominant modes of thought and writing of the day, which Rushdie describes as modernism. The article assumes a cheerfully unproblematic continuity between the immigrant condition and immigrant writing; the condition leads directly to the writing, in which it is assumed, it finds comfortable expression. The implications of the phrase 'whether writers or not' prevail through the essay, leaving the impression of a writer who is confident of sharing the perceptions of the immigrant community to which he feels he unquestionably belongs.

In 'Imaginary Homelands' Rushdie plays down the significance of his 'freak fair skin, 'English' English accent and education' (p.18), whereas it is arguable that all three point towards the same fact, his not freakish but socially and culturally constituted

separateness from the bulk of the 'immigrants' whose experience and ways of seeing he claims to analyse in the essay. Even if the very literariness of his essay, in its approach as well as terminology, did not make one sceptical enough, than the swift brushing aside of this significant social difference would in itself arouse suspicion.

This issue of the social difference, even separateness of the author from the subject was a preoccupation hinted at in *Midnight's Children*, and an uncomfortable writerly obsession in *Shame*. In his novels Rushdie has always been willing to question the continuity between himself and those he writes about, rather than assume that continuity, in ways suggested in a phrase such as 'whether writers or not.' It is also fair, though, to point out that Rushdie's idiom is always more polemical in his essays than in his fiction, and it is understandable that while conveying deep unease about his (as the writer, the narrator, the middle class anglicised Indian, the socially privileged immigrant) position vis à vis his subject matter and his authorial relationship with fellow immigrants in fiction, he projects an image of a unified and harmonious social and political front in the medium of journalism. In 'Imaginary Homelands' he is content to admit that 'England has done all right by me' (predictably because of his freak fair skin and his privileged education). He continues to point out in the same essay, 'take away any of these and the story would have been very different' (p.18), but chooses not to pursue the questions that would seem to follow logically from this observation. If his experience in England was so radically different from that of other immigrants not of his social class, colour and education, for whom he implies the story was very different, is it not at least possible that his way of interpreting immigrant experience might be 'very different' as well? An extension of this reasoning was in fact used repeatedly in attacks on Rushdie, by various Muslim individuals and organisations alike. Rushdie was portrayed as someone who was

not only radically different from the people he hoped to represent, and therefore unrepresentative of them, but as their betrayer as well.

Rushdie is not unique in this position: another powerful voice championing immigrant writing as a distinct category, Bharati Mukherjee finds grounds for celebration in the unifying enablement of becoming an immigrant. This, for her, meant abandoning the 'ironic' and 'superior' tone she had formerly used in 'describing [her] characters' pain.'¹³ As a result of finally taking American citizenship, which she describes as a 'literary experience,'¹⁴ she has undertaken to adopt a celebratory 'immigrant' tone, joining, with deliberation, 'imaginary forces with an anonymous, driven underclass of semi-assimilated Indians' (*Darkness*, p.3). Mukherjee emphasises that she 'saw herself' in the illegal busboys and Indian executives who listen to Hindi film music on their car stereos, arguing that her colonial background and deliberate, new, 'immigrant' attitude to fiction allows her to take on a 'set of fluid identities' (*Darkness*, p.3) and 'discover [her] material over and across the country, and up and down the social ladder' ('Maximalists,' p.29). Although, like Rushdie, Mukherjee presents images of the clashes within the community, between its more traditional and its assimilated members, she avoids addressing this issue in relation to her authorship.

It is possible that Rushdie as well 'saw himself' in the plight of the Asian immigrants of Britain. But the question which always springs to mind in the face of these claims, and was made explicit with the Rushdie affair, is whether this vision of unity and of identification is at all reciprocated. The relationship of Salman Rushdie as writer with the immigrant community in Britain, as well as with India and Pakistan was already ambiguous and not at all free from strain before the 'affair,' but, in its aftermath, the

fundamental rift which he seemed to have been avoiding in his articles, widened and had to be faced.

The first reviews of *The Satanic Verses* left the 'Islamic' sections virtually unmentioned, and concentrated on the 'immigrant' aspect. Angela Carter in her review in *The Guardian*¹⁵ talks happily about representations of the 'city' in both London and Jahilia, and the transformations that 'expatriates, immigrants, refugees' (p.10) inflict on it and themselves, concluding that 'you must read this populous, loquacious, sometimes hilarious, extraordinary contemporary novel' (p.12). In Bombay soon after, Nisha Puri lavished praise on this 'magnificent puzzle,' adding: 'it would hardly be rash to insist that *Midnight's Children* merely foretold the gusting, profound inventiveness of *The Satanic Verses*.'¹⁶ As for the dream sequences, Puri mentions them as a 'sideways brush with the Word in the Desert or the coming of Islam in the fabled city of Jahilia' (p.15), but this merits comparatively little space in a review which concentrates on the metamorphoses which the two protagonists pass through in their immigration, seeing *The Satanic Verses* as the final volume of an immigrant trilogy.

From celebrations of the great immigrant novel, to the notorious 'affair,' acted out in public demonstrations protesting against a conspiracy directed against the dignity of Muslims, to the Iranian death threat, the public image of *The Satanic Verses* altered at lightning speed. The book, which was alternately hailed as the great contemporary novel or attracted scathing remarks about its unreadability and the arrogance of its author, became a scapegoat and a political football in confrontations that quickly spiralled out of control.

In various interviews around the time of the book's international launch, Rushdie talked comfortably about the religious theme of the novel and brushed aside the suggestions that it could cause controversy and provoke a 'backlash from the mullahs.' In an interview with Shrabani Basu for *Sunday* in India, he showed surprise at the interviewer's suggestion that 'there was even a possibility that [*The Satanic Verses*] may not be published in India.' He answered, 'that's news to me... But it would be absurd to think that a book can cause riots. That's a strange sort of view of the world.'¹⁷ Words that sound ironic and naive with hindsight, but nevertheless represent the establishment view of the matter at the time, which in itself goes a considerable way to refute the theory which emerged later that Rushdie 'must have known what he was doing,' a line of argument which served, with some distorted logic, to suggest that he deserved what he got, and that *The Satanic Verses* was self-evidently explosive material, rather than at least partly a victim of circumstance, mishandling and the manipulation of an already-existing political conflict.

The novel was short-listed for the Booker Prize, later it was to win the Whitbread Prize. The press coverage was extensive, not always complimentary, but certainly showed no inkling that it might cause any large scale controversy. Whatever early 'warning' signs were received, were ignored, such as the unanswered letter from Hesham El Essawi, Chairman of the Islamic Society for the Promotion of Religious Tolerance, who, after reading the novel, wrote to its publishers on October 2nd, inviting them, in tones that now sound prophetic, to 'take some corrective stand before the monster that you have so heedlessly created grows, as it will do worldwide, into something uncontrollable.'¹⁸

Various Islamic organisations repeated this plea, and insistently and in increasingly angry tones called for the banning and withdrawal of the novel. In a public letter on October 28, Dr Mughram Al-Ghamdi, Convener of the newly formed UK Action Committee on Islamic Affairs, described the book as the 'most offensive, filthy and abusive book ever written by any hostile enemy of Islam,' and listed three demands and urged Muslims to take local action for their achievement (a petition, and representations to local MPs and police chiefs). He insisted on the immediate withdrawal and destruction of all copies of *The Satanic Verses* and banning of future publication, an 'unqualified public apology to the World Muslim community,' and the payment of 'adequate damages to an agreed Islamic charity in Britain.'¹⁹ The 28 October-10 November issue of *Impact International* printed a list of the 'blasphemous' passages, and repeated similar requests:

We have never ever made an editorial appeal like this, but we are asking readers to pursue demands both with the publishers and Muslim authorities through telegrams, letters, telephones, personal representations and through all civilised and legitimate means. But please leave Salman Rushdie all to himself and to his charmed circle of 'literary critics'. We have to say this because we also sense a milling anger about the outrage committed by him.²⁰

The pleas urging the banning of the novel under Britain's blasphemy laws, and the contingent demand that the law be extended to cover religions other than Christianity did provoke a reaction in the literary and political establishment. But the real anger and explicitly combative language emerged with the now notorious Bradford book burnings. The burnings themselves were described with stunningly different emphases by the various sides of the conflict: as a 'peaceful' protest and a 'democratic' expression of frustration by a group of people who had failed to attract attention to their point of view by any other means (Shabbir Akhtar describes it almost as a public relations exercise); or as an outrage and an obscenity comparable to the Nazi book burnings.

In *Be Careful With Mohammad!* Akhtar argues that the first of the book burnings was the result of the frustration of several weeks of behind the scenes activity which failed to get the desired level of response. He also attributes the much wider and more furious publicity attracted by the second book burning, which took place in Bradford in January 1989, to 'an accident of timing,' which resulted in Bradford becoming the 'newly discovered citadel of Muslim radicalism.' It was the Khomeini death threat that came in February that gave the Bradford incident its 'retrospective significance' (p.43). The perception which quite conclusively damned the Muslim and Islamist points of view even before public discussions had started in any form, was the simultaneous sinister identification, as a result of this 'accident in timing,' of the Bradford protests with Khomeini's fatwa, a savage form of fundamentalism from a state that for long has been regarded as the arch enemy of the West, and identified with 'Islam' in its most evil incarnation. Such an identification relied for its plausibility on a comparison of the Bradford protests with the Nazi book burnings, another classic evocation of repression, anti-enlightenment barbarity and danger.

The Nazi book burning analogy stuck with such force to the Bradford protestors, that the Iranian fatwa that came after might as well have been issued from Bradford. The two sources were seen as virtually identical - Tehran's Ayatollah Khomeini and the 'Ayatollahs of the North,' as Malise Ruthven nicknamed the Bradford Council of Mosques after interviewing a few of its members, most of whom, in fact, had their own, considered opinion on the 'Rushdie Affair,' rather than simply registering a blind acceptance of the 'fatwa.' Several of Ruthven's interviewees display a fervour that would discomfort a secularist, but none, incidentally, advocate murder, a fact which Ruthven's chosen title 'Ayatollahs of the North' disregards. Shabbir Akhtar, who played an active

role in organising the book burnings, in his book, various newspaper articles and a television debate in which he represented the 'fundamentalist' point of view, consistently distanced himself from the death threat and especially after Rushdie's reconciliatory essay 'In Good Faith' expressed 'sympathy with Rushdie' and even saluted 'his courage under difficult circumstances' (The *Guardian* article, p.19).

Yasmin Alibhai, in her article 'Beyond Belief' is one of several writers who argued that the Nazi analogy was untenable:

Muslims in general were vilified and compared to Nazis. There was no comparison, of course, between a ruthless state machinery of absolute power and this gesture of a frustrated group of people who had been rendered voiceless. But this did not stop the likes of Anthony Burgess... thundering: "The stupidity of the Islamic deathmongers burning a book they do not have the intelligence to understand... portends... the renewal of an ancient and basic struggle which the distraction of the cold war temporarily occluded." In other words, we know our enemy.²¹

The image of the fundamentalist Muslim as the enemy of Western liberalism, implicitly or explicitly, seeped into much writing about the Rushdie affair. Malise Ruthven's *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Wrath of Islam* sadly typifies the inescapable stereotyping that characterised the media representation of the Muslim behaviour. Though Ruthven's book includes much useful scholarly information and research about Islam and Muslims in Britain, he surrenders to melodrama even in the title of his book, and goes on to offer sweeping generalisations, often condemnations, in the text:

The Satanic Verses, a brilliant, playful, transgressive work that explores and parodies the very ingredients of Indo-British Muslim identity, mixing fact with fiction, history with myth, trod on the most sensitive spots in this brittle collective ego... For that vast majority of British Muslims, unaccustomed to the conventions of contemporary fiction with its rich and varied ingredients, Rushdie's riotous post-modernist pudding proved highly indigestible. They vomited their fury all over the streets of

London, committed solecisms in television studios, enraged... liberals everywhere by demanding that the book be withdrawn, and that the arcane laws of blasphemy be exhumed and extended to cover their faith (p.9).

The evocation of age-old stereotypes to manipulate public opinion about the Rushdie affair, and about Salman Rushdie himself, was not one-sided. Islam and the West were portrayed as principles diametrically opposed to one another not only by those speaking up for the absolute right for freedom of expression, but also by those defending the absolute sacredness of religious sensitivity. While one side maintained that the other could not appreciate the principle of freedom of speech and the particular way in which Rushdie chose to use it, because of its unintellectual, even anti-intellectual cast of mind, and lack of familiarity with modern, sophisticated, Western complexity of fictional form, the other side repeated its charge that the Western establishment, and its Third World intellectual cronies, could not understand the depth of feeling in the Muslim psyche because of their lack of morality, or understanding of religious feeling, and their ultimate materialism. In his article in *The Observer*, Michael Ignatieff writes about the 'ritual exchange of ancient misunderstandings and venerable condescensions' that has riddled the Rushdie affair from the moment of its conception, halting any possibility of communication:

People say the issue has been talked to the ground. I wonder whether the debate has even begun. The clichés that have rained down have left the entrenched positions on either side virtually untouched... On one side we have fanatical, medieval and intolerant Islam: the whole apparatus of cliché dates back to the Crusades. On the other side, we have the godless, materialist and hypocritical West. Centuries of European condescension mixed with exotic fascination towards Islam were bound to result in a discourse about 'us' as unseeing as our Orientalism has been about 'them'. Both sides are being declared in their indignations.²²

The confrontation of stereotypes in this particular political climate, where the 'host' population's unease and hostility towards the immigrant community in its midst, the perceived threat from the ethos of 'multiculturalism,' is juxtaposed with minority communities increasingly bitter and introverted has been explosive, as if the ferocious attack and counter-attack had been waiting only for a signal for battle to commence. Salman Rushdie became the pretext for, and the victim of this power struggle, where any recognition of the ultimate political powerlessness of the Muslim community has been occluded by its seeming sinister power over the freedom and life of one man. All other issues taken as manifestations of the Muslim community 'imposing their will' over that of the host population, such as the issue of separate, state-funded Muslim schools, came to be mentioned in the same breath as *The Satanic Verses*.

The Muslim community too seemed to share in this illusion of power, punishing in the image of Rushdie the symbol of their oppression. With his apparent assimilation, Rushdie came to symbolise betrayal even without reference to his blasphemy, and the Muslim community was urged by certain religious leaders to see him in this particular light: as Rushdie the apostate, the ex-Bombayite who liked to be called 'Simon Rushton' by his English friends (a version of himself which Rushdie had caricatured in the character of Saladin Chamcha in *The Satanic Verses*), the cultural traitor who maligned the culture and religion he left behind in order to ingratiate himself with the British establishment. The fact that he had become a successful writer was not to be seen as a source of pride, but as proof of his betrayal. Overall, the image of Rushdie projected was that of a man who had abandoned his people, and did not care for their feelings and their hurt. That Rushdie had for years campaigned vocally for immigrant and minority rights was not seen to contradict these claims. His case was not helped when the Rushdie affair

was used by various public figures as proof of the 'unassimilability,' therefore undesirableness of Muslims in Britain. The publicity surrounding *The Satanic Verses* allowed Rushdie to be used as a political football by various factions in British society. Rushdie, as I have argued earlier, within the context of his fiction, was aware of the ambiguities of being an immigrant writer who writes about his community, but is read mainly by a judgmental majority. He knew only too well that he was liable to being used and victimised in this power relationship and that he might be judged by the minority in terms of this particular role (What Gayatri Spivak terms, with reference to V.S. Naipaul, a 'witness in the Third World's prosecution'). The sceptre of the imagined censor of *Shame* seems to have risen to haunt Rushdie, in ways more extreme than he had allowed himself to contemplate.

The question of the Rushdie Affair, and the conflict that Rushdie found himself in with the Muslim community, boils down to the issue of who has the authority to speak for Muslims on a wide range of issues, not least concerning Islamic history and contemporary religion, about issues of integration and assimilation, which, especially in the current social climate, is more and more linked with issues of religious living and expression. In other words, who is an authentic-representative-authoritative Muslim-Asian or immigrant, and who has a right to voice the concerns of the community, or create an image that would be acceptable?

It is precisely on these points that Rushdie found himself under attack. His latent unease about his self-appointed position as spokesman for minority rights and the ambivalence inherent in any immigrant or post-colonial intellectual, could only have been strengthened by the irony of this new situation, where he was cast as the villain of the

piece, and criticised even by other immigrant intellectuals like Edward Said, Rana Kabbani, Tariq Modood and Yasmin Alibhai for 'adding to the anguish of an already deprived group' by his particular portrayal of Islam in a 'cultural context [that] is horrifically and even ludicrously inhospitable to such transgressions.'²³

Rushdie's outspoken resentment at being forced into what he called a position of 'accountability' to the community eventually gave way to a decision that shocked his defenders and accusers alike: on Christmas eve in 1990, he became, what he called, 'a Muslim.'²⁴ Some, like Yasmin Alibhai in 'New Statesman and Society' read this as a gesture of reconciliation:

When Rushdie now talks of not realising the hurt his book was likely to cause, this is partly what he is talking about. He is also beginning to realise that having respect and credibility in the community can be a necessary life force for writers like him. "What I think has been at the bottom of everything is a desire, first of all to put this behind us; secondly for me to rebuild my links with the community," he says. He seems to mean it (p.18).

We know now that his conversion, far from helping him 'rebuild his links with the community' was met with extreme suspicion and even hostility by the more extreme Muslim leaders, and as a betrayal by his 'liberal' defenders, as if he had joined the other 'camp.' The optimistic tone of his declaration 'Why I Have Embraced Islam' must now be a somewhat painful embarrassment to Rushdie, but the terminology he uses in the piece is very revealing:

I am able now to say that I am Muslim; in fact it is a source of happiness to say that I am now inside, and a part of, the community whose values have always been closest to my heart. I have in the past described the furore over *The Satanic Verses* as a family quarrel. Well, I'm now inside the family, and now Muslims can talk to Muslims and continue the

process of reconciliation that began with my Christmas Eve meeting with six Muslim scholars (p.430).

In the rest of the essay Rushdie talks insistently of 'goodwill,' of the 'affectionate' mood of this meeting, and a feeling of being 'reclaimed' (p.431) by the community, which, in turn, allowed him to reclaim the community of Muslims for himself. What is peculiar here is that in his conversion to Islam, Rushdie adopts an analogy which sketched himself as the banished family member who is hoping for reconciliation with his extended family, thus echoing the terminology of family and intimate betrayal that various Muslim groups had used to describe their hurt over the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. And his declaration that 'now Muslims can talk to Muslims' seems to affirm the claims of the likes of Shabbir Akhtar that he was not an 'authentic' Muslim before, and therefore had no right to write on Islam and Muslim immigrants. His conversion signalled, albeit unwillingly, an acceptance of the narrower definition of what it means to be a Muslim and an immigrant, and on this account might reasonably be termed a betrayal of what he had stood for before.

The Satanic Verses managed to divide its readers in more radical ways than any other recent literary text. The battle lines in their basic shapes were formed very early on, so much so that it was almost obligatory when talking about the novel to state whether one was for or against the book and its author. Later critics and readers - whether they were readers in the public domain who felt they had to register their response, or private readers at home who increasingly felt that they had to qualify their initial position - were inevitably led to reassess and redefine their initial opinions in the light of the alliances and battle lines that were being formed. Reading *The Satanic Verses* still inevitably entails a complicated business of taking sides, and joining a still combative field, but the

finer qualifications of being for or against are still being defined, and literary, political and communal loyalties tested. Every serious reader of *The Satanic Verses* after the Rushdie affair is compelled to define, or perhaps imaginatively create a niche in these delicate balances, not least Rushdie himself. His controversial conversion to Islam was a radical move to find his niche within the Muslim community. Later, upon the absolute failure of his attempt at a belated acceptance of orthodox Islam, he tried to define the intimacy of his relationship with Islam and Muslims in more convoluted terms, making precarious distinctions between 'Actually Existing Islam' and 'Islam as Family' which would allow him simultaneously to embrace and to repudiate his Islamic inheritance.²⁵

This is, in fact, precisely what the text at the centre of the controversy, *The Satanic Verses* had attempted to do by using the figure of blasphemy, and the simultaneity of intimacy and betrayal that it entails, as a metaphor for postcoloniality, and particularly the recreation of postcolonial and migrant selfhoods. Rushdie's, and the immigrant postcolonial writer's, blasphemy is thus the result of a continuing engagement with religious, cultural and national identities, manifested as a simultaneous approach, and a rejection and denial of the religion of an origin left behind.

NOTES

1. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York and London: Viking/Penguin, 1988).
2. Salman Rushdie, *Grimus* (London: Alfred A Knopf, 1975), *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982), and *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984).
3. Salman Rushdie, Introduction to Derek Bishton and John Reardon, *Home Front* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), pp.6-7, 'The New Empire Within Britain,' *New Society* (9 December 1982), p.417-20, and Introduction to Günter Grass, *On Writing and Politics* (London: Secher & Warburg, 1985), pp.ix-xv.
4. Ali Mazrui, 'The Moral Dilemma of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*,' in Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, eds., *The Rushdie File* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), pp.220-8 (p.220). Edited transcript of lecture delivered at Cornell University, 1 March 1989. Further references are in the text.
5. Shabbir Akhtar, *Be Careful with Mohammad!: The Salman Rushdie Affair* (London: Bellow, 1989). Further references are in the text.
6. Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith,' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.393-414. Further references are in the text.
7. Shabbir Akhtar, 'A Paperback Would Fuel Muslim Extremism,' *The Guardian* (18 August 1990), p.19. Further references are in the text.
8. Malise Ruthven, *A Satanic Affair: Salman Rushdie and the Rage of Islam* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1990). Further references are in the text.
9. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
10. For further discussion of this topic, see Chapter 5.
11. Salman Rushdie, 'Choice Between Light and Dark,' in *The Rushdie File*, pp.74-75 (p.74).
12. Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' in *Imaginary Homelands*, pp.9-21 (pp.12-3).
13. Bharati Mukherjee, Introduction to *Darkness* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1985), pp.1-4 (p.2). Further references are in the text.
14. Bharati Mukherjee, 'Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists,' *New York Times Book Review*, 28 Aug 1988, pp.1 and 28-9 (p.1).
15. Angela Carter, 'Angels in Dirty Places,' in *The Rushdie File*, pp.10-12. First published in *The Guardian*, 23 September 1988. Further references are in the text.
16. Nisha Puri, Interview with Rushdie, in *The Rushdie File*, pp.13-5 (p.13). First published in *Indian Post*, Bombay, 2 October 88. Further references are in the text.

17. Shrabani Basu, Interview with Rushdie, in *The Rushdie File*, pp.40-41 (p.40). First published in *Sunday*, India, 18-24 September 1988.
18. Hesham El Essawi, in *The Rushdie File*, p.56. First published in *The Observer*, 19 February 1989.
19. Mughram al-Ghamdi, in *The Rushdie File*, pp.58-60 (p.59). Letter dated 28 October 1988.
20. M.H. Faruqi, 'Publishing Sacrilege is not Acceptable,' in *The Rushdie File*, pp.60-1 (p.61). First published in *Impact International* (28 October-10 November 1988).
21. Yasmin Alibhai, 'Beyond Belief' *New Statesman and Society*, (15 February 1991), pp.17-8 (p.18).
22. Michael Ignatieff, 'The Value of Toleration,' in *The Rushdie File*, pp.249-52 (p.250). First published in *The Observer*, 2 April 1988.
23. Edward Said, in *The Rushdie File*, pp.175-7 (p.176). Extract made from statements made at the public meeting of 22 February 1989, 'American Writers in Support of Salman Rushdie.'
24. Salman Rushdie, 'Why I have Embraced Islam,' in *Imaginary Homelands*, pp.430-2 (p.430). Further references are in the text.
25. Salman Rushdie, 'One Man in a Doomed Balloon,' *The Guardian* (December 13 1991), p.19.

CHAPTER II: BHARATI MUKHERJEE: IMMIGRANTS, ROMANTICS AND 'TRUE AMERICANS'

'I'm one of you now' Bharati Mukherjee affirms with the opening sentence of her 1988 essay, 'Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!'¹ Though the piece is written ostentatiously in celebration of her naturalisation as an American citizen, the 'you' addressed here are not simply the - presumably American - readers of this article published in *New York Times Book Review*. Rather, Mukherjee limits her addressed audience to a specific section of American society, the immigrant community, of which she now considers herself a member. She describes naturalisation as not only a 'bureaucratic exercise' but also a 'literary experience.' Her essay, written almost as a manifesto, or a sermon of encouragement to upcoming immigrant writers, urges them to follow 'the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents passed through Ellis Island,' and is dedicated to the description of immigrant writing as Mukherjee would like to see it. She defines her notion of immigrant writing in two stages. Firstly and predictably, in contrast with mainstream American writing described here as 'minimalist' and 'nativist,' she pleads for a literature reflecting the 'epic that was washing up on [America's] shores,' namely the story of the processes of immigration and assimilation, a literature that is not afraid of having 'too much story to tell' (p.28). But her second and subtler point hinges upon a discussion of a certain loosely defined terminology, words such as 'exile', 'expatriate' and 'émigré' and ultimately posits 'immigrant' as a separate group defined by its common possession of a distinct mode of thought. This distinction, in fact, constitutes the theme of much of Bharati Mukherjee's critical writing, such as the introduction to her collection of short stories, *Darkness*, and the concluding passages of her travel book, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, and offers a

model useful for the discussion of her own fiction, as well as immigrant writing in general.²

Mukherjee's concept of immigrant writing aims to establish a rupture with the more common ways in which such literature had been discussed, and to a certain extent, written in the past. One school of criticism posits post-colonial and immigrant writing, as exemplified by Salman Rushdie, as products of contemporary literary movements, bracketing them in the same school with such writers as Graham Swift, Martin Amis, and Angela Carter among others. Pointing out the characteristics of alienation, loss of a sense of unified identity, questioning the validity of notions of authentic nationhood that are such a direct result of immigration, it is possible to emphasise the similarity of writing that results from and deals with migration to the post-modern literatures of the first world. Mukherjee's approach is, however, to emphasise the difference of immigrant writing from mainstream, in this case American, writing, rather than drawing such analogies. In 'Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!' she defines her response to what she terms the 'minimalism' of American fiction:

Minimalist fiction is deft, a shorthand of shared, almost coded responses to collective dread... I feel minimalism disguises a dangerous social agenda. Minimalism is nativist, it speaks in whispers to the initiated. As a newcomer, I can feel its chill, as though it were designed to keep out anyone with too much story to tell (p.28).

Another tendency is to discuss writers such as Mukherjee herself, or Salman Rushdie, along with the large number of distinguished writers that have emerged from the Indian subcontinent in the last decade or so, within the context of South-Asian/Indo-English literature, this time emphasising the fact that the writing is in English, and the writer is originally from a post-colonial country - to privilege, in other words, the culture from

which they came over their present state of being 'in exile,' or immigrants in the West. Many South Asian critics of Indo-English or Commonwealth Literature adopt this approach.

We are familiar enough with discussions of exile in literature and of understandings of modernist literature as the 'literature of exile.' A prominent example is Terry Eagleton, who prefaces his 1970 critical study *Exiles and Emigrés* with a discussion of the giant writers of English modernism, Joyce, Yeats, D.H. Lawrence, Eliot, Pound, James and Conrad in terms of their foreignness, or in the case of Lawrence, by describing his social position, his working class background as that of an 'internal émigré,' an 'outsider.'³ Andrew Gurr in his 1981 study of Katherine Mansfield, V.S. Naipaul and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Writers in Exile: the Identity of Home in Modern Literature*, follows a similar approach, but further highlights the specific social conditions which, he argues, made these three writers from completely different backgrounds into 'creative exiles,' a category which he claims, allows their fiction to be studied together as the work of a 'distinctive type of modern writer.'⁴ Gurr devotes an introductory chapter to a sociological discussion of the types of migration that produce these 'creative exiles.' For his purposes here, and tentatively, he equates the sociological terms 'gemeinschaft' (small, immobile, close-knit community) and 'gesellschaft' (large, impersonal and individualistic societies) to 'colony' and 'metropolis' (p.7), prefiguring the current use of terminology such as 'periphery', 'margins' and 'centre.' The distinction serves to politicise the relationship between the two ends of exile by emphasising the marginality of one and the centrality of the other, and the past and to a certain extent present dependence and cultural subservience of the colony that problematises the move of the colonial would-be writer or intellectual to the metropolis.

In order to reinforce his theory of creative exile, Gurr quotes Mary McCarthy's distinction between exile and expatriate writing in her essay 'Exiles, Expatriates and Internal Émigrés,' where she describes expatriation as a 'wholly voluntary detachment from the original home,' and exiles as 'banished victims deracinated and tortured by the long wait to go home' (Gurr, p.18). She offers James, Hemingway, Fitzgerald and generally the American community in Paris in the twenties as examples of expatriates, and James Joyce, as an exile. In a sweeping claim, McCarthy also suggests that while expatriate writing consists of a 'pot-pourri of the avant-garde and the decadent,' writing by exiles tends to be more straightforwardly political in content, a claim that does not quite cohere with Gurr's allocation of Joyce to the category of exile. Gurr adopts this distinction, and, applying to it his model of colony-and-metropolis, defines the expatriate as someone who moves from one metropolis to another, while the exile migrates from his native colony to a metropolis. In another sweeping generalisation, however tentatively put, Gurr adds poetry versus 'realistic prose fiction' (p.19) to the list of oppositions that may be listed under the headings expatriate and exile:

More pressingly concerned to find an audience than the metropolitan or expatriate writers, and with an outward society to depict rather than an inner psyche, [the exiles] turn to the explicitness of prose... The allusiveness and the imagism which are poetry's response to alienation are too obscure for the exile (p.19).

In the final analysis, what makes the writing of exile interesting for Andrew Gurr is the necessary intensity of the approach to the questions of identity and deracination that the condition of exile imposes on a creative writer. He examines the fictional recreation of the home left behind by Mansfield, Naipaul and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, arguing that the 'pressures of creative exile on these writers who were born in colonies and took flight to the metropolis [are] enormously constructive' (p.9). Through the construction of a

realistic, 'orderly and exact record of home' (p.13), the exiles acquire a clearer sense of identity than their metropolitan counterparts.

In spite of devoting a volume to the theme of exile, Gurr seems reluctant to discuss exiled writing independently, without annexing it to a possible discussion of mainstream English literature. After describing the psychosocial implications of migrating from the colony to the metropolis, he states that 'in varying degrees, the normal role for the modern creative writer is to be an exile... Deracination has become almost a prerequisite of intellectual distinction' (p.13). This is a common enough observation, made over and over again by an exiled writer like Rushdie, who proposed migration as a 'metaphor for all humanity,' and suggested that the triple uprooting from home, language and culture resulted in the immigrants and the immigrant writers having 'modernism forced upon' them.⁵ Even though this idea may render the writing of exile somewhat more critic-friendly, and find the literature a comfortable place in the practice of criticism and teaching, it runs the risk of depoliticising the condition of exile by blurring the difference between a metaphorical description, and an actual condition which is ridden with intense political problems. The purposes of *Writers in Exile* seem somehow suspect, for Gurr offers as the final justification for his study of exiled writers, the promise that such a study can provide new paradigms for the discussion of mainstream writing. According to Gurr's argument, exiled writers display the same characteristics of alienation and are concerned with the same search for identity that preoccupies mainstream writers. It is just that exiled writers present the themes more intensely, as a result of their physical deracination. Gurr observes that the exiled writer through fictionalised accounts of a lost childhood and a lost home can acquire a clearer sense of identity, somewhat simplifying the effects of migration, psychological as well as political, and assuming that the

reception of these writers in the metropolis to be comfortably neutral. It seems equally arguable, however, that migration and deracination would have the opposite effect by permanently destroying a clear sense of identity, and making any 'exact' or 'precise' description of home problematic as a result of the politically ambiguous move away from that home to the metropolis. Though the tendency to write about the lost childhood and home, and the attempt to create a surrogate home in one's fiction is clearly there in the literature of exile, the end result of it seems to confirm the loss, rather than the sense of belonging or identity.

Gurr's distinction between the expatriate and the exile is useful as it recognises the vast difference between the first world 'traveller,' in whose migration choice and the availability of options plays the definitive role, and the postcolonial exile whose move is prompted by compulsion, by the need to acquire the options and opportunities promised by the metropolis, for material survival, or as a result of the alienating process of a colonial education. But the same distinction is unsatisfactory as it stops short of granting the kind of ambiguity to exile that it does to expatriation. Though Gurr discusses how certain expatriates, such as D.H. Lawrence and Ezra Pound, are driven to exile, he seems content enough to describe the complex varieties of experience before and after the move from the colony to the metropolis under the one neat heading of 'exile.' Though he distinguishes between Henry James and V.S. Naipaul, the distinction between the 'permanent exile' of V.S. Naipaul and the 'homecoming' of Ngugi wa Thiong'o remains secondary and blurred. Given the description of expatriation as a voluntary detachment from one's cultural roots, would Naipaul, whose willingness to leave his native Trinidad for England is well-known, not be better described as an expatriate? Without diminishing the importance of distinguishing the creative travels of a Graham Greene or a Somerset

Maugham from a Nirad Chaudhuri or a V.S. Naipaul, it seems possible also to suggest that the differences between expatriation, exile or immigration, all considered within the context of a move or flight from the colony to the metropolis, are also a question of attitudes and emphases, that they are also a function of class, educational background and political and artistic stance.

In discussing Indian literature in English, the other tradition of criticism that makes use of the terminology that Andrew Gurr used in *Writers in Exile* emphasises the other side of the scale. Practised particularly by subcontinental critics, this school traces the links between the writing of exile and the native and post-colonial literatures of the country of origin, where the term 'expatriate' is made to apply to all colonial exiles, whose anglicisation seems to be their defining feature, whose alienation from an idealised native identity is emphasised, and in quite a few cases, criticised and condemned.

In her essay 'What Price Expatriation?' published in a collection of essays edited by Alastair Niven, *Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation*, Uma Parameswaran proposes that 'expatriate sensibility' become a new term in Commonwealth literature, establishing it as yet another category of mammoth proportions which includes all writers from the former colonies who write in English, regardless of whether they stay at home or choose to leave for the colonisers' metropolis.⁶ Parameswaran's analysis of the Indo-English background of expatriate writing covers the representative ways in which expatriate writing is viewed from within India and a native Indian literary tradition. She argues that 'each colonial literature was born a bastard child of Britain and a British colony,' written by a 'group of people who were alienated to varying degrees, from their native traditions' (p.41). For Parameswaran, this group,

frequently called 'native-aliens' already have the 'expatriate sensibility' even before they leave India to become 'expatriates in actuality' (p.43). She also argues that an expatriate is 'handicapped' as a result of his/her absence from India, which necessarily results in a loss of familiarity with Indian society:

An expatriate loses firsthand knowledge of economic, political and social changes, of current jargon, of dialect, even of such geographic elements as landscape, climate and vegetation (p.43).

The peculiar yet representative assumption behind this statement seems to refer back to her argument that 'native-aliens' and 'expatriates' are essentially the same people with the same concerns, passing by the possibility that, having left India, the expatriate might choose to use subject matters and settings other than Indian society and locations. This point of view seems diametrically opposed to what Terry Eagleton and Andrew Gurr argue in their studies, that the condition of exile is far from being a 'handicap,' but is rather an encouragement toward creativity, and that the expression of exile, as fact or as metaphor, is a central aspect of contemporary literature.

Parameswaran points out that expatriates 'arouse a kind of antipathy in their countrymen, vocalized by literary reviewers and critics' (p.44), and enumerates some common objections made to the works of the native-alien/expatriate:

1. they live outside the mainstream of Indian life and therefore are not genuinely Indian,
2. their portrayal of Indian society and traditions is not competent,
3. they write in English and not in Indian English,
4. their writing lacks Indian sensibility. (p.44).

It seems that the Indian public/critics are as unwilling to let go of their expatriate writers' consciousness, as unwilling to allow that they can and should be concerned with a

different set of issues than writers who have stayed at home, as the expatriates are unwilling to let go of India and 'suspended in mid-air... wholly repatriate themselves [or] wholly impatriate themselves into their adopted country' (p.45).

It is this sort of expatriation and its literary consequences that Mukherjee insists that she has come to see as 'the great temptation, even the enemy, of the ex-colonial, once Third-world author' (p.28). Her argument in 'Maximalists!' leans at least partly on a recognition of the validity of Parameswaran's list of criticisms, if in fact the expatriate refuses to make the leap to becoming an immigrant, and insists on hanging on to the 'purism' of Indianness:

When I visit writing classes around the country and see younger versions of myself... It's with a sinking sensation I read their stories, too often hokey concoctions composed of family memory and brief visits to ancestral villages. Here they are, masters of America in ways I can never be, turning their backs on some of the richest material ever conferred on a writer, for the fugitive attraction of something dead and "charming."

Let it [third world material] die... We're all here, and now, and whatever we were raised with is in us already. It's in your eyes and ears and in some special categories of our brains. Turn your attention to this scene, which has never been in greater need of new perspectives. See your models in this tradition, in the minority voices, the immigrant voices, the second generation Jews and Italians and Irish and French Canadians (p.29).

Mukherjee looks at expatriation from the other side of the ocean: her expatriate is not necessarily the anglicised, alienated post-colonial described by Parameswaran whose relationship with her native country is at once nostalgic and hostile. Her criticism of the expatriates is not directed at the degree of alienation they suffer from India: on the contrary, she condemns the level to which such writers remain dependent on native material, and the expatriate as a person, on her precarious Indianness, for a sense of identity.

Mukherjee redefines the terminology that is so central to the body of criticism that deals with the writing of the Indian diaspora, as exemplified in the work of Gurr and Parameswaran. In her own categorisation, immigration is the opposite of expatriation, and her criticism, as well as the progress of her fiction from her earlier work, *The Tiger's Daughter, Wife*, to the noticeable difference of authorial stance in her short stories, and her 1989 novel, *Jasmine*, is built on this tension.⁷ Mukherjee's expatriate (herself, in her early fiction) maintains her difference - from *immigrants* rather than from 'authentic' Indians as in the native-aliens theory - with a conscious refusal to 'play the game of immigration' and in an effort to avoid 'the messiness of rebirth as an immigrant' ('Maximalists,' p.28).

Admitting to falling victim to the temptation of expatriation herself in her earlier writing, she describes her passage from being an expatriate to being an immigrant, a process she perceives as having close parallels with her passage from Canada to America. In her definition, expatriation becomes a mood 'comforting but deceptive' ('Maximalists,' p.1), a role that she assumed in reaction to the anti-assimilation policy of Canada, that allowed its immigrants a separate identity, but discriminated against them in their separateness. Though alienated from India as a result of her convent school education there, a period of postgraduate study in America, and years spent living in Canada, impatriation, the adoption of a Canada that 'routinely made crippling assumptions about [her], and about [her] "kind"' (*Darkness*, p.3) was not an option. Mukherjee's reaction to this imposed 'suspension in mid-air' is a pose of aloofness, a pose which is, in its implications of class and educational superiority, and in its willing detachment from both cultures that the writer is in contact with, somewhat ideologically suspect. In her introduction to

Darkness, Mukherjee tells why she chose V.S. Naipaul as a model for her expatriate writing:

In my fiction, and in my Canadian experience 'immigrants' were lost souls, put upon and pathetic. Expatriates, on the other hand, knew all too well who and what they were, and what foul fate had befallen them. Like V.S. Naipaul, in whom I imagined a model, I tried to explore state-of-the-art expatriation. Like Naipaul, I used a mordant and self-protective irony in describing my characters' pain. Irony promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well-bred post-colonials much like myself, adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong (*Darkness*, p.3).

Elsewhere she also mentions how she 'cloaked herself' protectively in her 'Brahminical elegance,' as it was the only thing she could lean on in order to 'define me, to tell me I was not the thing society said I was' (*Maximalists*, p.28). The loss of home and the endeavour to recreate that loss through and in one's fiction that Gurr had attributed to the writer in exile are characteristics of Mukherjee's definition of the expatriate. Nevertheless, the sense of 'clear' identity to be gained by this endeavour, by looking back and describing oneself in terms of cultural roots, turns out in Mukherjee's case to be an upper class identity, establishing itself by establishing superiority over the masses of discriminated 'immigrants' who try to tackle the problems of assimilation, of acquiring new roots, belonging.

Once again in her introduction to *Darkness*, Mukherjee identifies her move from Canada to America as a move from being a 'visible minority' to being 'just another immigrant,' from the 'aloofness of expatriation,' to the 'exuberance of immigration' (p.3). While her tone during her self-confessed expatriation was a 'weary bitterness... certifying the purity of [her] pain and [her] moral superiority,' in accepting her immigration, which she had

formerly described as 'declass  ... low-grade ashcan realism implied in the material,' she acquires a distinctly celebratory tone:

I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous, driven, underclass of semi-assimilated Indians with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return. I see my "immigrant" story replicated in half a dozen American cities, and instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a "visible" disfigurement to be hidden), I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated. I see myself as an American writer in the tradition of other American writers whose parents or grandparents passed through Ellis Island. Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world (*Darkness*, p.3).

Studying Mukherjee's novels and short stories chronologically, it is possible to see a passage from harsh, almost self destructive satire, a morbid demonstration of the suffocation of possibilities, to what can be described as a qualified celebration of the immigrant ethos of a new start in the face of past suffering and broken identities, in her own words, 'the will to bond oneself to a new community, against the ever-present fear of failure and betrayal' (*Darkness*, p.3).

Mukherjee's first two novels, *The Tiger's Daughter* and *Wife*, written in the phase that Mukherjee labels 'expatriate,' display a comparable attitude of deterministic pessimism concerning the immigrant condition, though they deal with strikingly different heroines. Tara Banerjee in the earlier novel is upper-class, and still finds reflected glory in her distinguished father, the eponymous 'Bengal Tiger.' She is highly educated, first by Belgian nuns in her girls' school in Calcutta, then in an Ivy League university in America. She has the choices and comforts that her educated and moneyed background brings: married to an American writer, she has not had to accept an arranged marriage, neither does she need to confine herself within the literal and metaphorical claustrophobia of a

ghetto life in America. She moves in quite different circles to Dimple Basu, the much less privileged heroine of *Wife*. Dimple arrives at New York, an adjunct to her engineer husband's wish to earn some quick cash in the new world, and finds that her position both in her arranged marriage and her new life in the States is drastically different from the one glossy Indian magazines and romance novels had led her to imagine. Both, however, are, using Parameswaran's terminology, 'suspended in mid-air,' unable to find a 'desh' at either end, in a state of foreignness that neither is able to surpass. Both novels deal with the 'fear of failure and betrayal,' whether it be manifested in the loneliness of upper-class expatriation, or the claustrophobia and oppression of a dutiful wife in a ghetto.

The Tiger's Daughter stresses the impossibility of going back, the deceptiveness of nostalgia and the inescapability of the 'foreignness of spirit' (p.37) that accompanies its heroine, irrespective of geography. Tara Banerjee, the only daughter of wealthy Bengali Brahmin parents, descendant of a family of landowners, is sent, at fifteen, to study in America. The novel starts with Tara, seven years later, now married to an American writer, David Cartwright, coming back to her native Calcutta for a summer holiday. Tara is driven by a sense of nostalgia: she wishes to be reunited with the certainty of values, of absolute class superiority, that in the Calcutta of her childhood did not involve any guilt, and to bask once again in the familiarity of surroundings that she imagines she can know and understand, in contrast with the ultimate, bewildering unknowability of New York.

Tara is the archetypal 'native-alien:' she complains of a 'foreignness of spirit' the beginning of which she cannot pinpoint - 'right at the center of Calcutta, with forty ruddy

Belgian women' or 'with the winter chill at Vassar?' (p.37). Her foreignness manifests itself in terms of a discomfort in India, a country which she now sees critically, through alienated eyes, when she had wanted to be nostalgic and sentimental. The Calcutta circle she had herself been a part of, and now tries to rejoin, is quintessentially colonial. Sitting on the terrace of the Catelli-Continental Hotel in Calcutta over cups of coffee and witty conversations with her friends, who are all Bengali Brahmins like herself, Tara reflects, not for the first time, that she no longer wishes to belong:

Some instinct told her to stay away from these people who were her friends, only more, much more, for they were shavings of her own personality. She feared their tone, their omissions, their aristocratic oneness (p.43).

A year after writing this novel, Bharati Mukherjee herself spent a year in India with her husband, the novelist Clark Blaise, and a travel book entitled *Days and Nights in Calcutta* resulted from their research-holiday. In the concluding sections, she mentions that what died in that year in India was her 'need for easy consolation,' which she counts as a step from exile towards immigration. It is just such a need for 'easy consolation' that Mukherjee had almost ridiculed in *The Tiger's Daughter*: Tara hopes to find solace for her foreignness through her return to India, only to discover that her stay in the West has marred her vision irrevocably. But her discomfort in her native city does not bring with it a corresponding sense of comfort in America, or a renewed commitment to belong to her adopted country, as Mukherjee asserts occurred in her own case. Neither is it the case that the upper-class Calcutta set of mind is the only one that Tara feels emotionally and intellectually alienated from. Their voices clash with the righteous liberal voice of her husband, who in outraged aerogrammes urges her to 'take a stance against injustice, against unemployment, hunger and bribery' (p.131). Tara is caught between two visions,

two world-views, unable to subscribe to either, forever shifting and defensive. She tries, in a series of letters to David, to defend and explain herself, but is obsessively aware of the futility of the attempt, aware that 'such events could not be described' (p.63).

Her voice in these letters was insipid or shrill, and she tore them up... She felt there was no way she could describe in an aerogramme the endless conversations at the Catelli-Continental, or the strange old man in a blazer who tried to catch her eye in a café, or the hatred of aunt Jharna or the bitterness of slogans scrawled on walls of stores and hotels (p.63).

David's stance in his regular letters seems just as threateningly distant, and 'foreign,' and his view of India as superficial and artificial as that of the Catelli-Continental group's is aristocratic and deliberately ignorant. His letters are informed by an international intellectualism - Ved Mehta, William James, Segal all make an appearance: David reads the biography of William James, and the journals of Ved Mehta that 'bring home to [him] the dangers that surround her everyday' (p.201). He urges Tara to 'remember the unseen, the dangers of India' and to tell her parents to 'cable me if you get sick' (p.62). Later in one of his letters of outrage, he tells Tara that he 'started to read Segal's book on India' and writes 'with Segal, I shudder' (p.131). Tara's own nervous voice finds no place among the 'aristocratic oneness' of privileged Calcutta, and is weighed down by the bulk of Western literary precedents that inform David's understanding of India, which makes no concessions to Tara's Indianness.

The narrative and speaking voices of *The Tiger's Daughter* have an anglicised slant. Even though Tara is on vacation from her PhD in the United States, her voice does not come across as particularly Americanised. Tara's PhD topic is Katharine Mansfield, a New Zealander who spent her adult life in England, and who figures regularly in studies of literary exile. In a way, Tara is studying expatriation, though not quite her own, and

she displays equal measures of sadness and naiveté about her own situation. David's voice, too, has an international anonymity, if not an outright anglicised tone. It is a voice distinct from the American male voices that dominate Mukherjee's later work: the humorous, democratic voices of Milt in *Wife* and Taylor in *Jasmine*, or the underachieving Vietnam vets that appear in her short stories, dealing with the new faces of America, all expressed through distinctly American voices, colloquialisms and situations.

Gurr had specified the wish of the expatriate writer to recreate the lost home in fictional form, and argued that this was an enabling urge. Parameswaran also notes the tendency, but sees it as the only, limited and doomed avenue open to the expatriate writer. Salman Rushdie as well, in 'Imaginary Homelands,' describes the ways in which Indian writers in England 'are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back' (p.10). Rushdie argues that this will inevitably result in the creation of 'imaginary' Indias, as the problems of the partiality of memory are in this case intensified by feelings of nostalgia and guilt. Mukherjee's first novel, conversely, though it might recognize the wish, angrily attacks any possibility of such a nostalgic and sentimental 'easy consolation.' Mukherjee does not re-create her lost home or reconstruct her Indian childhood in her fiction. *The Tiger's Daughter* is not a novel comparable to *A House for Mr Biswas*, cited by Gurr in support of his argument, or to *Midnight's Children*, or the wave of 'obligatory immigrant novels' it inspired, labelled and criticised ('the writer as spokesperson for a particular group becomes a kind of political football') as such by Rohinton Mistry.⁸ Mukherjee's driving concern in this novel seems to be an overwhelming sense of loss, of bitterness, of the impossibility of espousing either world, which results in a bitter, ruthless satirisation of both.

The situational similarity of Tara to her creator is apparent, which brings to mind Mukherjee's confession that in her 'expatriate' phase she had used 'mordant and self-protective irony in describing her characters' pain,' because it 'promised both detachment from, and superiority over, those well-bred post-colonials much like [herself], adrift in the new world, wondering if they would ever belong' (p.2). It is difficult to see to what extent, if at all, Mukherjee meant her satirisation of Tara to be self-reflexive. But Tara's ultimate lack of individual vision or voice inevitably reflects on the author of a book that destroys all possibility of a valid existence in-between cultures, for it destroys her own authorial position by making it indistinguishable from her heroine's. By portraying Tara at the end of the book, trapped in a car in the middle of street riots and violence that she cannot understand, Mukherjee, intentionally or not, portrays the expatriate writer as trapped in a kind of solipsism, caught between two worlds in a perpetual foreignness, so that she can only portray things negatively, express only anger, disillusionment and contempt, and is ultimately confined to a knowledge of what cannot be said and what cannot be understood. Tara acknowledges that 'her dreams and her straining would yield a knowledge that was visionless' (p.9) - a diagnosis equally applicable to the novel of which she is the heroine.

Bharati Mukherjee's second novel, *Wife* is a study of immigration, but in no way a celebration of it, as has become the trademark of immigrant writing since. The condition of exile has been hailed by critics like Andrew Gurr, and the chief exponent of immigrant writing, Salman Rushdie, as a condition of potential: the migrant should, at least ideally, be able to reconstruct a new, plural identity, experiment within a liberating ideological vacuum, unconstricted by the petrified social codes of either the native or the adopted country. Bharati Mukherjee's reaction to immigration at this stage is aggression:

with harsh satire she destroys any easy solutions to the uprootedness, the sense of loss and profound cultural confusion. Idealisation of Indian roots, celebration of mixture and pluralism or clinging to nostalgia are all treated with contemptuous dismissal. She refuses to celebrate a pluralism that she believes to be ridden with insoluble conflicts. The theoretically romantic mixture of east and west in the potential for happiness and freedom in immigrant life dissolves as Mukherjee rips apart her stereotypes.

Wife, based almost entirely on the Bengali-immigrant community of New York, introduces Dimple Basu, a middle class Bengali girl who immigrates to America with the husband chosen by her parents, and eventually ends up killing him. The novel's tone is comparable to *The Tiger's Daughter*: this is another satiric novel, dealing with stereotyped characters who are unable to make sense of their situation or voice their thoughts. The anger, however, is more pointedly directed against the waste of potential, represented in the character of Dimple. It is, perhaps, only with *Jasmine* that Mukherjee portrays a character who *is* intelligent enough, and determined enough to go on, brave enough to metamorphose and amoral enough to deny the oppressive pull of communal responsibility.

What this grim novel of social determinism emphasises is precisely the lack of hope and meaningful social change that results from immigration. Dimple's immigration manifests itself as insanity - or perhaps schizophrenia becomes the only avenue open to a consciousness shaped by her particular set of circumstances. Dimple is crushed and driven to insanity both by the repressiveness that is the immigrant community's legacy from the Indian society it remains rooted in, and the promise and denial of another, liberated world, in such a way that the condition of insanity almost becomes an

alternative metaphor for the immigrant condition. She is caught, however, not only between India and America, but between the worlds of her imagination and its discrepancy from her everyday reality as well. India and America present Dimple with idealised images of womanhood that cannot be reconciled: her crippling starts with her upbringing as a potential wife for the ideal husband, in whose service she has to demonstrate her virtue and her worth. She yearns for the 'heroism' represented through the mythical figures of Sita and Savitri, but her daily existence is relentlessly unheroic. Sita and Savitri, Indian myths of ideal womanhood, and still prevalent role models present heroic women as righteous, unquestioning, obedient and sacrificing. Both Dimple and Jasmine have to contend with the tyranny of such 'heroic' role models. Dimple's conception of heroism, after this model, is passivity and renunciation, unlike the narratives of individual emancipation that America generates. American television and magazines, which she spends her days watching and reading, project narratives of individual fulfilment and feminist emancipation. In New York, through the figure of Ina Mullick, she is forced to recognise a different kind of feminine identity. Ina tells Dimple that she is just another version of herself when she arrived in the United States, shy and pliant, and always polite. Now she is a seemingly liberated, Americanised woman who wears trousers, eats beef and drinks in parties at which she and her husband entertain Americans as well as Bengalis. The possibility of conforming to the model of Ina who is just as inconsistent and lost as Dimple under her facade of liberation, whose feminism looks so selfish, isolating in its individualism and 'unheroic,' adds to Dimple's bewilderment. A far cry from finding the ideological vacuum and the possibility of recreating her identity liberating, the increasing awareness of the artificiality of her surroundings leads Dimple to schizophrenia, which is presented as separated only by a thin line from the reality of immigrant experience. Even her violence in the last page of

the novel is an expression of her ultimate confusion of reality, and her inability to cope with the influx of new experiences that are hitting her:

She brought her right hand up and with the knife stabbed... each time a little harder, until the milk in the bowl of cereal was a pretty pink and the flakes were mushy and would have embarrassed any advertiser, and then she saw the head fall off - but of course it was her imagination because she was not sure anymore what she had seen on TV and what she had seen in the private screen of three A.M. - and it stayed upright on the counter top, still with its eyes averted from her face, and she said very loudly to the knife... "I wonder if Leni can make a base for it; she is supposed to be very clever with her fingers."

Women on television got away with murder (pp.212-213).

In *Days and Nights in Calcutta* which she wrote the year after *The Tiger's Daughter*, following a visit that peculiarly echoes Tara's visit to Calcutta, Mukherjee looks into her subject position, and the position of the voice that she adopts in speaking of India, in passages of rigorous self-analysis. The travel book is co-authored with her husband, the American writer Clark Blaise, which provides an interesting double-perspective on a year spent together. The book opens with Clark Blaise's section, giving his account of the year-long stay in Bombay and Calcutta, of his impressions of the intricacies of the extended family, the caste system, of mixing with the rich and exclusive as well as the intelligentsia of Calcutta. Mukherjee's account constitutes the second half of the book, and inevitably reads as a contrasting voice. The husband-wife relationship comes to represent a kind of power relation akin to the East/West conflict, with the 'Eastern' wife trying to talk back, to 'differ,' though she too has to see India through Western eyes, because of the double-perspective instilled in her as the academic/postcolonial immigrant. This is reinforced by Mukherjee's self-confessed feeling of resentment against all Westerners in India, including her husband, and the resulting argumentative need 'to assert [her] right to differ from him' (p.202). Tara in *The Tiger's Daughter* had

found herself in a similar dilemma, of defending her husband to her friends, and her friends to her husband, while privately she felt critical of both, and in the end had failed to assert her 'right to differ' from either position, and remained trapped in the voicelessness of the in-between, of a person with no subject position of her own. It is odd that Mukherjee wrote this book *after* having produced a character like Tara, especially as she seems to face the same issues that she had satirised so fiercely in *The Tiger's Daughter* in her own visit home. Even the vocabulary is similar, showing how much of Mukherjee's own life and concerns were transposed onto her heroine, from autobiographical details such as the academic career in America and the marriage to an American writer, to the wish for 'easy consolation,' a phrase Mukherjee uses repeatedly, through the return to India and the kind of political confusion that Tara faces between the authoritarianism of her Indian environment and the liberal standpoint of her husband.

It seems that re-living personally the plot-idea of her novel obliges Mukherjee to question her supposed 'ironic superiority' to her heroine, and to question the use of irony itself in handling an Indian subject matter from her almost-Western 'expatriate' position. The irony here seems not only to derive from the 'aloofness' of expatriation, which could have its roots in class difference, but also to be a product of the influence of a colonialist and a Western education on the consciousness of the expatriate, introducing the issue of complicity. This Mukherjee implies by her use of a terminology which echoes that of colonialism: she attributes the reason for having allowed irony to 'invade and conquer [her] quite so completely' to her 'excessive familiarity with British novels, and... a too-long association with departments of English' (p.200):

Once back in Montreal, thinking about my friends in their gently-lit lawns and the sidewalk dwellers who were always just out of reach, I realised

that no matter what I might write about them, my reader and I will exchange a conspiratorial wink. But my point is that in India I forgot to wink. Rich and poor alike concentrate on survival and on minimizing humiliating personal defeats. Irony is the privilege of observers and of affluent societies (p.200).

Mukherjee, like Tara, is caught between the position of the privileged observer and the wish to become an unironic participator, and evade the fact of her complicity. Tara had tried ineffectively to argue with David that his liberal principles could not be transposed simply to the situation of Calcutta, 'the misery of her city was too immense and blurred to be listed and assailed one by one' (p.131), but couldn't help feeling the weakness of her ground in the face of the powerful rhetoric in which David insisted on the virtues of democratic values. Tara's intellectual inefficacy is frequently satirised in the novel, as is the stereotyped 'Western' voice of her husband. In *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, however, Mukherjee re-writes the stereotypes of *The Tiger's Daughter* lending the earlier novel a new human weight, as Mukherjee shows herself to be vulnerable to what she had satirised:

Later, during arguments with Clark, I heard myself defending my friends' faith in authoritarianism as the only prescription for the troubled city. I wanted to show him how thinly spread had been my acquisition of liberal sentiments, and how fast the process of unlearning could become. To defend my friends was to assert my right to differ from him. It was for me a self-gratifying, vicious game, not an argument about politics (p.202).

The tone of self-irony is still evident in this passage, as Mukherjee admits to shedding her 'acquisition of liberal sentiments' to indulge in 'purely Indian clichés that 'conceptual democracy' had to be interpreted differently in 'chaotic, developing nations' (p.203). Though this argument both in its causes and in its inconclusive irony is a close echo of Tara's, its tone is remarkably different. In a way, it signals Mukherjee's attempt at lowering herself to the level of participation with concerns to which she had formerly

tried to be 'ironically superior.' This abandoning of a superior stance, of 'Brahminical elegance,' in order to consciously assume a more sympathetic voice that deals with characters from all layers of society, is the primary factor in Mukherjee's passage from what she defines as 'expatriation' to 'immigration.' It may seem somewhat patronising, or at least unselfconsciously romantic to assume that such a passage to a more democratic authorial position can be achieved, while the author remains a bourgeois member of a Western academic and literary social circle, who probably has little contact with the 'underclass of semi-assimilated Indians' (*Darkness*, p.3). But, despite this, there does not seem to be any ironic self-consciousness in Bharati Mukherjee's work of the kind that one associates with Salman Rushdie, or other writers of 'exile' or 'immigration.'

Days and Nights in Calcutta is a book somewhat confused in its messages. Though it admits guilt about having satirised 'her friends' from the perspective of Montreal, of the privileged observer, it still seems to give into the game of exchanging a 'conspiratorial wink' with the Western reader in its description of upper-class life in Calcutta. Though it is in this book that Mukherjee first hints at her passage from an 'exile' to an 'immigrant,' her conception of such a passage, and her definition of immigration is not yet the exuberant espousal of rebirth as an immigrant in 'Give Us Your Maximalists!' The difference is hinted at by her choice of model:

In myself I detect a pale and immature reflection of Naipaul; it is he who has written most movingly about the pain and absurdity of art and exile... The tolerant incomprehension of hosts, the absolute impossibility of ever having a home, a *desh* (p.28)

But a few years later, in her introduction to *Darkness*, Mukherjee declared that she had given up Naipaul as a model, whose work she now described as 'expatriate', and

criticised the urge, in her own work, to write 'state-of-the-art expatriation' (*Darkness*, p.2). Accordingly her fiction moves away from the absolute impossibility of belonging, and begins to place different emphases on the experience of immigration, noticeably so in *Jasmine* and her later short stories.

Bharati Mukherjee's first published work after *Wife* was her 1985 collection of short stories, *Darkness*. In the introduction Mukherjee separates the stories in the volume into two groups; the 'purely Canadian' stories, which she wrote before her move to the United States, and a group of stories she wrote within a short span of time, 'in a burst of energy' (p.1) in Atlanta, 1984. The Canadian stories, she writes, were painful stories about expatriation, 'difficult to write and even more painful to live through' (p.2).

'The World According to Hsü' and 'Isolated Incidents' are Mukherjee's representations of Asians in Canada; injured by racism, reduced to pathetic stereotypes, or, as in the case of Ratna Clayton in 'The World According to Hsü,' irritable, argumentative, lost, disillusioned. These stories do not quite have the 'superior' authorial voice of the earlier fiction, but the overwhelming sense of irrevocable loss and waste that was felt in *Wife* is out on the surface, and it produces characters that seem little more than victims of ruthless systems larger than themselves.

'The World According to Hsü' is the story of an inter-racial couple, Graeme and Ratna Clayton, who go on holiday to an unnamed island 'off the coast of Africa' to 'find refuge from... fruitless debates' about whether or not they should move from Montreal to Toronto, where Graeme has been offered a prestigious academic job. Graeme, being of

English origin, no longer feels comfortable in an increasingly nationalistic Quebec, but Ratna is less than happy with the idea of Toronto:

She claimed to be happy enough in Montreal, less perturbed by the impersonal revenges of Quebec politicians than personal attacks by Toronto racists. In Montreal she was merely "English," a grim joke on generations of British segregationists... In Toronto, she was not Canadian, not even Indian. She was something called, after the imported idiom of London, a Paki. And for Pakis, Toronto was hell (p.41).

The relationship of Ratna and Graeme, like all inter-racial marriages and relationships in Mukherjee's fiction, is representative, a microcosm of power relations that exceeds the individuals' wills. Once on the island, Ratna is told by Graeme that he had, before leaving, accepted the post in Toronto; he promises that if anything happens to her, they will leave immediately, leading Ratna to brood on their relationship:

Once not long ago she had believed in the capacity of these virtues [tenderness, affection, decency] to restore symmetry to lives mangled by larger, blunter antipathies (p.47).

What was hoped to be a an idyllic, escapist holiday in 'this island of spices, this misplaced Tahiti, this misplaced anachronism,' acquires a sinister tone. The Indian residents of the island and their shops are suffering the violent backlash of 'an unreported revolution' (p.41) which draws Ratna into the position of the embattled victim once again. She finds herself in the French-colonial atmosphere of the Papillon hotel in which they become 'prisoners,' trying not to think of the future:

On that small island, in that besieged dining hall... As long as she could sit and listen to the other guests converse in a mutually agreed-upon second language, she would be alright (p.54)

...

Like her, they were non-islanders, refugees. No matter where she lived, she would never feel so at home again (p.56).

'Isolated Incidents,' based in the Toronto that Ratna had feared, with racist attacks, police indifference, discrimination in job prospects, is the story of Ann Vane, an upper-middle class ex-Montrealer who works in a human rights advice office, and feels she has been too 'circumspect,' and that her life is 'closing in on her' (p.85). The main storyline follows Ann having a reunion with an old school friend, Poppy, who has since become a pop-star and leads a life of wild decadence in Los Angeles. Ann aspires to Poppy's freedom to leave, only to 'come home again and again' (p.88), her Canadianness undamaged by her absence. In the background are the cases that Ann has to deal with at the office, before her meeting with Poppy: a young Indian attacked in the subway, treated by the police as an 'isolated incident,' not necessarily racial in nature; a highly qualified Indian scientist denied a university position because of 'half-articulated, coded objections' (p.79) such as her sing-song accent, her lack of humour; and the case of Mr Fernandez, who is trying to get a residence permit for his sister, who he claims came over to marry only to find the prospective groom marrying someone else. The real but unglamorous grievances of these people whom Ann is unable to help, and by whose 'passionate delivery [which] sounded like bad translation' (p.91) she is no longer moved, make a caricature of Poppy's polished image as a traveller, that she advertises on televised interviews: 'you can take the girl out of Canada... But you can't take Canada out of the girl, no way!' (p.77).

Both short stories function by juxtaposing the condition of an immigrant, such as Ratna Clayton, or Mr Hernandez's sister who has to 'hide in back rooms with drapes pulled tight, crouch behind the sofa at each ring of the doorbell, stare at game shows till glassy eyed' (p.92) in order not to be deported, with a Canadian in a similar situation: Graeme Clayton is being driven out of Montreal because he is an anglophone, and Ann Vane sees

an affinity between her wish to leave and the urges of the immigrants she deals with every day:

Every day at work she saw men and women who had sold their savings in tropical villages to make new beginnings in icy Canada. Not everyone had done well, but they had taken a chance. Sometimes you had to leave the safe and sober places of the world... Poppy had shown her that you could come home again and again (pp.87-88).

This juxtaposition, however, functions not as a comparison, but reveals the asymmetry of power and possibility, even motive, in these situations, rather than attributing metaphorical content to the experience of migration and travel. These are, in fact, stories of homelessness, of being stranded and confined as a result of migration, rather than achieving the hoped-for broadening of horizons. Their authorial voice, describing the inefficacy of the exiled mind, brooding on change, waste and loss, perhaps is comparable to V.S. Naipaul's.

The rest of the stories in *Darkness*, and the stories in her 1989 collection, *The Middleman and Other Stories*, are, Mukherjee claims, products of what can be defined as her American phase. Still displaying characteristics of Mukherjee's relentless, unforgiving style, they represent her effort to 'join imaginative forces' with the new immigrants of America. In 'Maximalists!' she had pleaded for an immigrant writing that was 'maximalist' and 'exuberant,' a notion reminiscent of the terminology that Rushdie uses to describe the mood of his fiction, his 'teeming,' 'multitudinous' structures. Rushdie uses his technical versatility to create multi-layered, highly-orchestrated forms out of chaotic material, characteristically of epic proportions. Defending himself against the criticism that *Midnight's Children* was too defeatist, he had claimed that its form suggested otherwise. In his essay 'Imaginary Homelands' he argued that by setting up a

tension in the text, 'a paradoxical opposition between the form and the content of the narrative,' he tried to 'echo... the Indian talent for non-stop self-regeneration.'

This is why the narrative constantly throws up new stories, why it 'teems'. The form - multitudinous, hinting at the infinite possibilities of the country - is the optimistic counterweight to Saleem's personal tragedy ('Imaginary Homelands,' p.16).

Mukherjee's work does not showcase technical versatility in the way Rushdie's often does (whose style in *Shame*, along with Amitav Ghosh's in *The Circle of Reason*, she had criticised, paraphrasing Joyce, for having 'too much cunning and not enough silence' in 'Maximalists!'(p.28)).⁹ Her brand of exuberance and optimism is rather attributable to the variety of voices and situations she portrays in her range of stories. But the idea of celebrating Indian/immigrant experience by attributing to it 'infinite possibilities' and 'non-stop regeneration,' even though the particular stories told might not have happy endings and harmonious resolutions, is perhaps applicable to Mukherjee's 'immigrant' work, and constitutes the theme of the collection, *The Middleman and Other Stories*.

An important factor in the complexity and richness of these stories, contributing towards her claim of exuberance, is the shifting point of view: Mukherjee's narrators change from an Indian mature student at an American University to a Vietnam vet hit-man, from an American 'low-level money manager' having a troubled affair with a Filipina 'makeup artist' of aristocratic background, to a Trinidad-Indian babysitter having an affair with her employer. These shifting points of view serve to give differing perspectives of the same picture, showing how immigration affects different layers and sections of society, as well as providing a politicised edge to Mukherjee's claim to a more democratic voice.

In 'Give Us Your Maximalists!' Mukherjee attributes this 'chameleonic' vision to her colonial background:

The duality of the colonial writer [is that she] learns to see [herself] as both the dispossessor and the dispossessed, be two things simultaneously, both *we* and *other*. Perhaps it is this history-mandated training in seeing myself as the 'other' that now heaps on me a fluid set of identities denied to most of my American counterparts. Chameleon-skinned, I discover my material over and across the country, and up and down the social ladder (p.29).

Such an attempt to turn colonial alienation to authorial advantage is not novel: in fact, it constitutes the basis of Gurr's notion of 'creative exile.' Gurr argues, with peculiar logic, and as yet without reference to the political implications of his claim, that the physical distancing from the 'home' would give the exiled writer a clearer sense of it, and that this in turn would give rise to better literature. Immigrant writing necessarily stresses the complex relationship with the society of arrival, as well as the 'home' left behind. It seems tenuous, however, to argue that this process would give rise to a 'clear sense of identity' (p.13), even before one might wish to take to task the assumption that such a certainty would in fact produce good writing. Mukherjee's writing does in fact dwell on the issue of creating an alternative immigrant identity. Her characters struggle to escape from the ambiguous condition of being 'at the one and the same time insiders and outsiders in [their adopted] society' to use Salman Rushdie's words to express the common formula. Such ambiguity, however, has proved productive of fiction. Rushdie in 'Imaginary Homelands' defines the postcolonial/immigrant slant in terms akin to Mukherjee's, as 'stereoscopic,' coming from a 'double perspective' and he posits such 'stereoscopic vision' in opposition to what he argues is the lost hope of modern fiction 'perhaps what [immigrant writers] can offer in place of 'whole sight'(Imaginary Homelands, p.19).

Though Mukherjee describes her own naturalisation in celebratory and optimistic terms, as her homecoming into a nation of immigrants, and her preference for the assimilationist melting pot immigration ethos of the United States over the multi-ethnic mosaic of Canada is clear in her writing, her fiction is noticeably more ambivalent. It is clearly Mukherjee's ideal to provide insight into both sides of the picture: rather than idealise the 'melting pot,' to show its Eurocentric bias; and look at the influx of immigration through Western eyes, rather than giving into a romanticising tendency.

In 'A Wife's Story,' Panna, a university student in New York, finds herself unable to give in to anger after watching *Glengarry Glen Ross*, a play in which David Mamet makes offensive references to 'Patels.' Her reiteration of the ambiguity thrust upon her vision, though comparable in some ways to Mukherjee's definition in 'Maximalists!' is considerably less exuberant:

It's not my fault, it's the *situation*. Old colonies wear down. Patels - the new pioneers - have to be suspicious. Idi Amin's lesson is permanent... I know how both sides feel, that's the trouble. The Patel sniffing out scams, the sad salesman on the stage: postcolonialism has made me their referee. It's hate I long for; simple, brutish, partisan hate (pp.25-26).

In this context the 'duality' of vision appears to be more of a burden than a blessing; clarity of sight lost in an attempt to see 'both sides.' The American dream, for all its assimilationist thrust, seems, to Panna, a 'tyranny:'

First, you don't exist. Then you're invisible. Then you're funny. Then you're disgusting. Insult, my American friends tell me, is a kind of acceptance... I long, at times, for clear cut-answers. Offer me instant dignity, today, and I'll take it (p.24).

The referee's position is inevitably, though not happily, occupied by Panna. Her clinical referee's vision forces her to disloyalties she is too 'well-bred' (p.25) or too ashamed to express. Having seen herself through Mamet's eyes, she then looks at her husband, briefly visiting her in New York, and sees him through American eyes. Her husband's conspicuous foreignness, his provincial manners and tastes are blown out of proportion, in contrast to her Hungarian refugee friend, who seems 'old-worldly' and possesses a cultured, suave veneer. The disloyalty of her judgmental gaze, however, is a thing of burning shame, too strong to be expressed in any clarity. She attempts to retain a loyalty to both men and both visions - a manoeuvre which leaves her feeling 'guilt shame loyalty. I long to be ungracious, not ingratiate myself with both men' (p.33). Her clinical clear-sightedness extends to herself, but does not in any way give her a 'clearer sense of identity.' Catching a glimpse of her naked body in the mirror at the end of the story, she is 'amazed' by more than its beauty - 'I stand here shameless, in ways he has never seen me. I am free, afloat, watching somebody else' (p.41).

Such complication of vision is made explicit in other stories in the collection. The position of the referee, the loss of simplicity of vision, and the concomitant loss of dignity are internalised by Panna in 'A Wife's Story.' The thrust of her questioning - refereeing - vision is repeated in the other stories, where the narrating voice is more often American than Indian, as Mukherjee examines the ways in which the self-professed nation of immigrants deals with its new wave of immigrants from the third world.

'See[ing] herself as the other' proves to be a position that Mukherjee is adept at. In 'Loose Ends,' the gaze is reciprocal. In a violent story of cultures clashing, a hit-man on the run scrutinises the Indian owners of the hotel he intends to hide in, and sees his scrutiny

returned: 'they look at me. A bunch of aliens and they stare like I'm the freak' (p.52). He finds the sight of 'a lot of little brown people sitting cross-legged on the floor of a regular motel room and eating with their hands' (p.52) repulsive. But this, too, is mirrored, by the young daughter of the Indian family, whom he is about to rape: 'that's when I catch the look on her face. Disgust, isn't that what it is? Distaste for the likes of me' (pp.54-55).

The changes wrought upon the adopted country are seen in these stories through the eyes of Americans rather than immigrants. In 'Fighting for the Rebound,' Griff muses that his Filipina girlfriend has 'no need to feel foreign' in Atlanta: 'Just wheel your shopping cart through aisles of bok choy and twenty kinds of Jamaican spices at the Farmers' Market, and you'll see that the US of A is still a pioneer country' (p.79). But despite his enlightened - though somewhat facile and consumerist - approach to a new hybridity, Griff's private fantasies reveal a different political dynamic to his attraction to Blanquita. When she complains that he does not love her, and is looking for excuses to leave, Griff asks himself: 'why do I think she's said it all before? Why do I hear "sailor" instead of my name?' (p.81).

In Mukherjee's later work, American imperialism has replaced the British. Her language becomes noticeably Americanised, and the idiom through which she discusses foreignness becomes one imbued with American imagery. The Raj has little space in *The Middleman*, even when the immigrants in question hail from the Indian subcontinent. Instead, the Vietnam war is a self-conscious image: with that particular type of American abroad, the language of superpower warfare breeds a certain relationship between the American self and the 'other,' whether this be Vietnamese, or any other nationality from the third world.

Again in 'Loose Ends,' Jeb the hit-man sees the influx of Asian immigrants as a failure of their purposes in Vietnam: 'Back when me and my buddies were barricading the front door, who left the back door open?' (p.48). In 'Fathering' another Vietnam Vet tries to welcome his half-Vietnamese daughter by 'the honeyest-skinned bar girl with the tiniest feet in Saigon,' the ten year old Eng, into his family - they both speak the language of, and see each other through the filter of Saigon: 'thanks, soldier' (p.120) for the gift of a quarter, 'scram, Yankee bastard' when she is forced to see a doctor. The father, too, joins the wargame: 'I jerk her away from our enemies. My Saigon kid and me: we're a team. In five minutes we'll be safely away in the cold chariot of our van' (p.122).

In many ways, Bharati Mukherjee is an assimilationist, as evidenced by her hostility to the Canadian 'mosaic' theory of permanent ethnic pluralism, where each ethnic group would preserve its cultural heritage indefinitely, in a 'community,' while also taking part in the general life of the nation a system which she claimed turned her into a visible outcast, and facilitated discrimination. Ideally, the American ethos of assimilation should be a direct contrast: a 'melting-pot' where both immigrants and native-born Americans are meant to blend freely with and reshape each other, and create 'Americans' of a new definition. The stories in *The Middleman* picture just such an America, changing with the impact of waves of immigrants from round the world, and carefully revealing the imbalance of power governing the mechanics of their inevitable assimilation and discrimination. But however ironically Mukherjee treats the idealism of the 'melting-pot' theory, these stories and their protagonists are in the last analysis unquestionably 'American.' One example is 'Orbiting,' which is the closest Mukherjee's stories come to singing a love song to the immigrant. In the story, a second generation Italian-American

woman having an affair with an Afghani political refugee, decides to show her love for him and her admiration for his 'immigrant' difference, by helping him assimilate:

I realize all in a rush how much I love this man with his blemished, tortured body. I will give him citizenship if he asks. Vic was beautiful, but Vic was self-sufficient. Ro's my chance to heal the world.

I shall teach him how to walk like an American, how to dress like Brent but better, how to fill up a room as Dad does instead of melting and blending but sticking out the Afghan way. In spite of the funny way he holds himself and the funny way he moves his head from side to side when he wants to say yes, Ro is Clint Eastwood, scarred hero and survivor (p.76).

In 'Orbiting' the point of view that Mukherjee adopts is not that of the Afghani immigrant, but of his Italian-American girlfriend. From a point of near-total comfortable assimilation and Americanisation, her eyes rest on the newcomer, alternately romanticising and cringing with embarrassment. Her love will be expressed by helping him become less foreign, and she starts her project by typecasting him in an American image: Ro's complicated political history and commitment is subsumed into a romantic country-western theme in the figure of the outcast cowboy. However benign the purpose in this particular story, such a project has sinister undertones when seen as an analogy for the celebrated American melting-pot.¹⁰

The assimilationist thrust of Mukherjee's fiction has provoked a hostile reception, especially after the publication of her novel, *Jasmine*. This hostility took various alternative forms, though all mostly stemmed from the ambiguity of Mukherjee's position, which she herself dwelled on in her earlier writing, as a postcolonial writer with a privileged background. Whether she chooses to foreground this privileged background in interviews, or to dismiss it in her adoption of a new, democratic voice, the charge of

elitism seems to stand. Mukherjee has been frequently condemned for stereotyping and satirising Indians and Indian communities in America, for representing them as 'colonial others,' as well as for eliding the fundamental difference, in terms of class, between herself and the heroine she created in *Jasmine*.¹¹

Jasmine the novel has its origins in a short story of the same name included in *Middleman*. Unlike the omniscient narration of the short story, however, the novel is written as the first person narrative of its heroine. This shift in narrative voice signals a change in authorial attitude that can be interpreted in different ways. The short story portrays a young Trinidad-Indian baby-sitter, also called Jasmine. Mukherjee conceived the story in reaction to Naipaul and his contention, as she saw it, that 'if you are born far from the centre of the universe you are doomed to an incomplete, worthless little life.'¹² Her representation of Jasmine, whose origins are similar to Naipaul's she argues, should be read as the story of a 'smart' and 'desirous' (p.27) girl who knows 'exactly what it is she wants and what she is willing to trade off in order to get what she wants' (p.22). Despite this attempt at a jaunty, un-Naipaul-like representation of a Caribbean Indian migrant forging her own fate in America, 'rushing wildly into the future,' Jasmine's relocation to America is filtered through narrative irony: as she makes love with her employer at the end of the story, Jasmine thinks that 'she'd never felt this good on the island where men did this all the time, and girls went along with it always for favors. You couldn't feel really good in a nothing place.' The hopefulness and possibilities of her newfound freedom in America, where she is a girl with 'no nothing other than what she wanted to invent and tell,' is dampened by the observation that 'she forgot all the dreariness of her new life and gave herself up to it.'¹³ However assertive, wilful and lively Jasmine might be, the narrative irony confines her attempts at liberation within a grim existence whose

pathos is revealed to the reader. This is a character who has not been given the self-aware intelligence and reflectiveness that makes the Jasmine of the novel such an attractive character, and her story one of success and energy.

Judie Newman, in her chapter on *Jasmine* in *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* argues that the shift in narrative voice from the third person to the first in the novel 'restor[es] her own voice to Jasmine,' and by so doing 'avoids reduplicating the male gaze,' and by implication the Western imperial gaze, which in either narrative would construct the 'Third World Woman as Other in the very process of 'looking' itself.'¹⁴ While the novel does avoid the framing of an unsophisticated third-world character, whose voice is rendered in island patois, within the voice of an ironic narrator, the shift in pronouns perhaps runs other risks and raises other issues of authorial gaze, and as such the dynamics of its acts of 'looking' are receptive to further analysis.

In order to discuss issues of voice and gaze in *Jasmine*, it is perhaps useful to trace elements in the novel of stories in *Middleman* besides 'Jasmine.' In describing the quality of her foreignness in Iowa, her relationship with her husband, his relatives and neighbours, Jasmine's tone is similar to Panna's in 'A Wife's Story,' where she debates the necessity of loyalty and betrayal when identities are recreated, self-definitions changed. However, though Panna's language, and her painful clear-sightedness is comparable to Jasmine's, her background is not. Panna's 'exquisite' manners bear the traces of 'expensive girls' schools in Lausanne and Bombay,' which she combines with a 'rhetoric... learned elsewhere,' studying special education at a New York university. This is a biography similar to Mukherjee's own, whereas Jyoti the Punjabi peasant and her later

reincarnations follow directly from her manifesto in 'Maximalists' where she claims the ability to cross social boundaries, and choose her material across racial and class divides.

In her introduction to *Darkness*, Mukherjee affirms that she 'sees herself' in Indian businessmen in Manhattan listening to Hindi film music in their cars, and illegal immigrant busboys living in fear of police raids - characters who have found their way into her short stories. This straightforward identification, however, sits uneasily with the idea of the complicity of the postcolonial gaze developed in *Middleman*, eloquently expressed through Panna's belief that postcolonialism has made her a reluctant referee, and forced her into inevitable betrayals. Though Mukherjee's interpretation of postcolonial training on her own voice and vision in her introduction to *Darkness* and in 'Maximalists' is worded similarly to Panna's in 'A Wife's Story,' the conclusions that the story reaches are markedly different. Mukherjee claims that the 'history mandated training to see [herself] as the other' ('Maximalists,' p.29) enables her to identify with the position of 'otherness,' to see herself in 'outcasts... professors, domestics, high school students, illegal busboys in ethnic restaurants' (*Darkness*, p.3), whether these be in the Indian community of Queens, the Korean community in New York, Afghani refugees or Punjabi peasants. This somewhat plays down the effect of cultural alienation caused by moving from a culture that has been made subservient through colonisation, and by being educated in the institutions of a world power, and reinterprets it as almost a kind of mysticism, an enabling vision developed through a process of grievances. The complicitous and judgmental postcolonial gaze, studied so well in *Middleman*, arguably gives way to this less politically analysed idealism in *Jasmine*.

But it could be argued that Mukherjee's transformation of the immigrant condition into a kind of enabling, inclusive and democratic vision, where once she had set herself up in the role of the 'referee' rather than the victim, is indicative of her position. Her version of the 'immigrant,' in the character of Jasmine, with her choice of ultimate individualism, and denial of any communal or familial sense of identity, might offer a vision for the individual immigrant, but avoids confronting the issues of immigrant communities, and the choices such communities must make as to whether they should preserve their cultures or assimilate. In identifying with and representing the 'other,' the archetypal immigrant, in the character of Jasmine, Mukherjee perhaps manifests contradictory impulses: she focusses on the figure of the immigrant underclass in Jasmine, only to represent in her experience a generic, homogenised identity.

The short stories in *Middleman* are class conscious, conscious of the nuances of voice and grades of complicity, and the ways that the immigrant characters' baggages of class are inscribed in the new world. In 'Fighting for the Rebound,' Blanquita clings to the aristocratic aura of her childhood in Manila, unaware that her American boss is only making sexual advances to her because 'he wouldn't dare try it on the office girls' (p.86). Jasmine of the short story brings her own sense of class superiority over from Trinidad, looking down on her employers from 'a tupenny-ha'penny country town, Chaguanas.' She is disgruntled, however, that the Daboo daughters 'didn't seem to know they were nobodies, and kept looking at her and giggling' (p.124). Jasmine of the novel, on the other hand, once she overcomes her initial, largely linguistic discomfort, effortlessly achieves comfort and confidence in the new social situations she finds herself in. Within months of arriving in the States, she has adapted to a life as a classless 'care-giver' who, despite having had only the most rudimentary education given by a village school and

her engineer husband's electrical manuals, is at home in the life of an academic household in New York, as a capable 'day-mummy' asking Duff, her six year old charge 'enriching questions' (p.185), swelling her bank account by teaching Punjabi to businessmen and academics. The discomfort remains with *Jasmine* in what seems an unironic use of the same first person narrator, who is at once a Punjabi peasant and a politically sophisticated, socially polished new American.

Jasmine is, in comparison with Mukherjee's earlier fiction, curiously class-blind, as if the author, in resolving to abandon her 'Brahminical elegance' ('Maximalists,' p.28) and to 'join imaginative forces with... the underclass' (*Darkness*, p.3), evades the political implications of such a move altogether. The short stories play brilliantly with the complicity of her gaze, whereas *Jasmine* opts to concentrate on the fluidity of change and the homogeneity of immigrant experience, and plays with the possibility of a dream America that would make this possible.

Mukherjee shows her allegiance to such a generalised, universalised category of the 'other,' of immigrant experience as well as immigrant writing that cuts across class and ethnic boundaries, in 'Maximalists,' where she urges new writers to 'let [Third World material] die' and to 'see [their] models in this tradition, in the minority voices, the immigrant voices, the second generation Jews and Italians and Irish and French Canadians' (p.29). In an interview in *Bazaar*, she speaks somewhat disparagingly of writers who concentrate on ethnic identity, and the expectation that she should write 'quaint little stories about the Indian ghetto, or nostalgia about aristocratic Calcutta.'

I could have done an Anita Desai or a Maxine Hong Kingston number.
But so far, I'm the only one among non-European immigrant writers, or

the first-or-second-or-third-generation Chinese American writers who is writing about the whole country as opposed to the ghetto world. I give people the ashcan realism, the downside as well as the upside, the hustle and the sleaze as well as the heroism and excitement of being a dislocated person in the New World.¹⁵

Perceptions of ethnic difference play a role in *Jasmine*, but are universalised. Against expectations, the reader's and her own, Jasmine's Iowan small town turns out to be a close relative of her Punjabi village. As a child, Jasmine vaguely remembers seeing a film that translated to Punjabi as 'Seven Village Girls Find Seven Boys to Marry' and reading *Shane*, a book 'about an American village just like the Punjab.' The inhabitants of Elsa county worry about issues of daily survival just as her brothers had in Hasnapur, and both places suffer similar stresses of change and violence that threaten their fragile stability. Ethnic fragmentation, and the mentality of blaming other ethnic groups for poverty is rife in both places. In the Punjab, the 'Khalsa Lions' fighting for an independent Khalistan blame Hindus for their plight. In Elsa County, the 'Aryan Nation' movement distribute leaflets exclaiming 'Jews take over our farmland!' (p.158). Jasmine watches television interviews with locals who sympathise with the actions of the white supremacists, making a 'crazy connection' (p.27) between their inability to make house and car payments and the influx of Mexican immigrants. On the eve of her decision to leave her disabled Iowan lover to depart for Los Angeles, Jasmine realises that her dilemma is not 'choosing between men,' she is 'caught between the promise of America and old-world dutifulness' (p.240). The dilemma is simple and stark, and unchanging: this choice is identical to the 'litany' she had learned by heart when she married Prakash, her progressive Indian husband, and which made her feel 'suspended between worlds' (p.76), between the village of Hasnapur and a relatively independent existence in provincial Jullundar. This serves an anti-essentialist purpose, by not representing India

as a dark other fundamentally different to the symbolically central location of the US, but as a place subject to comparable forces of tradition and violent change, where painful choices between loyalty and betrayal are becoming inevitable. The regular comparisons demystify the perception of 'otherness,' but they also homogenise and eradicate difference and colonial and Third World history, and the specific realities they might engender.

Jasmine's home and native identity is fragmented even before it is threatened by Sikh terrorism and she is obliged to leave her village and migrate to America. Her childhood in post-partition India has already prepared her for the movement and loss of a rooted selfhood that her young adult life pushes her into. Jasmine's family are descended from Lahori landowners, who 'after fleeing Lahore... [have] been cast adrift in an uncaring, tasteless, corrupt, coarse, ignorant world,' but hold on to their fragile Lahori identity: 'Lahore visionaries, Lahore women, Lahore music, Lahore ghazals: my father lived in a bunker' (p.42). But Jasmine is as unwilling to confine herself to her father's 'bunker' mentality ('he'll never see Lahore again and I never have. Only a fool would let it rule his life' (p.43)) as she is to the rigidity of Punjabiness recreated in the ghetto of Queens ('They had kept a certain kind of Punjab alive, even if that Punjab never existed' (p.162)).

Instead of following the community example of exile as preservation of an imagined and idealised ethnicity, Jasmine changes at an alarming rate. She names the two elements that define her transformation from Jyoti to Jasmine as 'ambition and imagination' - to these essences of 'Vijh & Wife' (the electrical shop that she and Prakash dreamt of owning one day, symbolising their partnership and independence) she has to remind herself to remain faithful throughout her picaresque travels through America. As a child,

Jasmine is given reading material in English by the village teacher: *Alice in Wonderland*, *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*, books which she finds too difficult to read at the time, but which serve as apt references later: all speak of imagination and ambition, of the possibility of, and desire for, illusory other worlds.

In the *Bazaar* interview with Maya Jaggi, Mukherjee described Jasmine, as a 'true American in the sense that she's a romantic: she wants to keep the frontier open, and is constantly seeing a remaking of her self in the future' (p.9). To this image of Americanness the novel stays true - a show of fidelity and romance with her new nation that many of Mukherjee's critics found offensive. This representation of Jasmine's Americanness perhaps relates her to a fictional precedent for her 'imagination and ambition' that is not mentioned in the novel: Jasmine is as much Jay Gatsby/James Gatz, as she is Pip and Jane Eyre, and any other fictional - particularly American - dreamer who 'sprang from his Platonic conception of himself.'¹⁶

Jasmine's migration is a homage to the American themes of adventure and frontier, of the quest for a new, ideal home as the quintessential American dream. What Jasmine changes into, and the specific nature of such change, is more important, and more 'real' than what she had been, her 'native' identity. Looking at college prospectuses with Prakash, the Vijn & Wife team already consider life in America as more 'real' than in the Punjab, and the Indian faces photographed on the brochures as already foreign: 'For the first time in my life I was looking at Indian faces and seeing them as strange, a kind of tribe of intense men with oily hair, heavy-rimmed glasses, and mustaches' (p.92). Finding herself confined in the Queens ghetto later, Jasmine is oppressed by what feels like a regression to her pre-Prakash days:

I would find myself in the bathroom with the light off, head down on the cold, cracked rim of the sink, sobbing from unnamed, unfulfilled wants. In Flushing I felt immured. An imaginary bricked wall topped with barbed wire cut me off from the past and kept me from breaking into the future. I was a prisoner doing unreal time (p.148).¹⁷

The 'imaginary' dreamlike aspect of her American lives are emphasised by Jasmine in New York, where she comes closest to realising an unironic American dream, and 'bloom[s] from a diffident alien with forged documents into adventurous Jase' under Taylor's tutelage. Taylor's formula for surviving and remaking one's self in America is simple. When he realises that Jasmine is too frightened to leave the apartment because she has spent 'her entire paycheck' on unnecessary and extravagant mail-order objects, that the mailman, like a terrorist, keeps delivering, Taylor needs to instruct her in Americanness:

Taylor rescued me. "America, America!" Taylor said one day... He wrote on a package in thick marking pen RETURN TO SENDER. That's all you need to do, he explained. If something gets too frightening, just pull down an imaginary shade that says RETURN on it and you can make it go away (p.186).

This is a lesson that Jasmine takes to heart, and a message that Taylor repeats when he is trying to convince her to leave Bud, and move with him to LA. In true frontier fashion, he persuades Jasmine to make yet another adventurous move: 'New York's over. We're heading west' (p.239). Taylor and Jase take along their 'unorthodox family' to go further West in a road movie/frontier quest move, ending up in Los Angeles, land of angels, films and fantasies. This forward looking romanticism of the assimilation/American dream/rags to riches saga, however, though it may be a narrative of emancipation and hope, reads perhaps more as fantasy than as the 'ashcan realism' that Mukherjee claims her fiction offers.

Mukherjee has used various descriptions for her relationship to her material, and defined her position of authorship in several ways. In an interview with Alison Carb, she defines her 'task' as making 'my intricate and unknown world comprehensible to mainstream American readers.'¹⁸ This is the author as cultural translator, though the culture she wishes to make comprehensible is not the traditional 'subaltern' culture or even necessarily Indian like herself, but the third world immigrant population of America, the 'unassimilated underclass' she had referred to in 'Maximalists.' She claims, in the same interview, that 'if [her] fiction is effective, unexplained and cultural aspects about the Indian community in Queens or the Korean community in New York will become accessible' (p.653). This notion of accessibility however, is perhaps naively not seen by Mukherjee as offering third world material for scrutiny by the mainstream gaze.

Gail Ching-Liang Low, quoting Bhabha, suggests that the acts of 'mimicking' and 'doubling' in *Jasmine* are worth considering, in defense of the charge that Mukherjee's fiction is straightforwardly assimilationist. Mukherjee herself argues as much in the *Bazaar* interview, by defining her fiction as 'giving them [white Americans] back America in new ways' (p.13). Mimicry, in Homi Bhabha's very un-Naipaul-like definition, is 'one of the many forms of survival in post-colonial situations' but also a strategy productive of subversion and irony: 'ironic 'doubling' disturbs an originary essence of identity by returning a *different* and strange image of the self,' thereby questioning conceptions of identity as authentic and uncreated.¹⁹ Instances of unsettling mimicry are common in the short stories: Blanquita, imitating the cheerleaders on television turns an all-American activity into something alien and disconcerting. In 'Orbiting,' Rindy observes that when she is with Ro she feels she is 'looking at America through the wrong end of a telescope. He makes it sound like a police state, with sudden

raids, papers, detention centers, deportations, and torture and death waiting in the wings' (p.66). The Brooklyn that Ro inhabits has a 'neighbourhood [called] 'Little Kabul,' though probably no one else has ever noticed' (p.64).

Jasmine as a novel is in a sense constructed from such 'doubling' - it tells the quintessentially American story of frontiers and reinventions of national and individual identity, the land of new opportunities and the American dream, adding fresh stories to the narrative of the 'land of immigrants' (*The Holder of the World* has a similar impulse, rewriting *The Scarlet Letter* in a way Hawthorne could not be blamed 'for shying away from'²⁰). Jasmine herself mimics and doubles a myriad American roles, in a series of discontinuous identities: Jazzy the sassy young girl taught by Lillian Gordon to 'act American,' humorous and refined day-mummy in a liberal American household, adventurous Jase, live-in lover of a Manhattan academic, Jane Ripplemeyer, wife and mother-to-be, living with a banker in small-town America in the Iowan heartland.

The extent to which Jasmine's mimicry does change the Americas she comes into contact with, is another question. She is, like Du, her Vietnamese adopted son with his hybrid electronics, 'alter[ing] the gene pool' (p.156) of America by having Bud Ripplemeyer's child, and by riding off to the sunset with Taylor to form her 'unorthodox family' (p.238).

The changes she wreaks along the way, however, are subversive only in ways she is ironic about: 'I am subverting the taste buds of Elsa County' (p.19), she grimly jokes, by serving matar panir with pork, or taking gobi aloo to the village fete, echoing Griff in 'Fighting for the Rebound' for whom multiculturalism found perfect expression in supermarket aisles stocked with exotic goods. Bud, her Iowan lover, opts to adopt Du on impulse because 'the East has made him emotional and impulsive' but this somewhat

stereotyped Eastern impulsiveness of his is based on an understanding of Jasmine that is false: she is, from the day she meets him, his 'Indian princess,' a 'maharani:' he loves her exoticism, but the less he knows about her real past as a deprived peasant or a brutalised immigrant, the less it troubles him.

The discontinuity of Jasmine's identity is largely the creation of others, and takes shape under their gaze. Her first husband, Prakash, sees in her the potential for a 'new kind of city woman' (p.77) in Indian-Pygmalion fashion, and forces on her her first renaming: Jyoti the peasant becomes Jasmine the modern Indian who has to partake of her husband's dreams of having a 'real life' in America (p.81), and 'shuttle[s] between identities' (p.77). Once in America, her own foreignness signifies differently to different rescuers. Within minutes of meeting her, Lillian Gordon can identify the origin of the blood-soaked, exhausted figure of Jasmine as the Punjab (though she guesses her to be Sikh, a suggestion that Jasmine, whose husband was killed by a Sikh bomb, finds offensive). Her past, however, is an irrelevance, she becomes a protegee of this 'kind Quaker lady' along with the Kanjobal Indians who have ended up in her house after her daughter, a photographer, did a journalistic study of them. This is a half-way house run by a woman who 'forbade all discussion of [the past]... had a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia' (p.131). As far as she is concerned, Jasmine is 'lucky... that India had once been a British colony. Can you imagine being stuck with a language like Dutch or Portuguese?' (p.132). The real priority here is to learn how to 'walk and talk American' (p.133), to facilitate an entry into American society and its job market.

For Taylor and Wylie, too, despite their anti-racist language, Jasmine is a generic other, who is to be, in the best possible way, rescued. Their walls are covered in posters that in her first day, unused to their sense of first-world irony, Jasmine sees as offensive to women and foreigners: 'there were slave-auction posters from New Orleans in 1850, speaking of healthy wenches and strong bucks; old color prints celebrating the massacre of an entire Indian village down to the last baby; a poster of a naked woman with parts of her body labeled choice, prime, or chuck, as in a butcher's shop' (p.174).

Jasmine's revelation of the details of her past life - that her husband was blown up by terrorists, that she killed a man who raped her - comes as a shock to Taylor, who had thus far seen Jasmine as 'an innocent child he had picked out of the gutter, discovered, and made whole, then fallen in love with' (p.189). Significantly, Jasmine had been complicit with this picture, and this new, subtler, Pygmalion transformation: on her first day with the Hayeses, she wishes to conform to their vision of her: 'I wanted to become the person that they thought they saw: humorous, intelligent, refined, affectionate. Not illegal, not murderer, not widowed, raped, destitute, fearful' (p.171). She changes not because of Taylor who 'didn't want to scour and sanitize the foreignness,' but because she 'wanted to. To bunker oneself inside nostalgia, to sheathe the heart in a bulletproof vest, was to be a coward' (p.185). Jasmine is treated with generosity, but all the changes she goes through are nevertheless life denying in their expectation - her past is unmentioned at Lillian Gordon's and in New York, and Bud can only cope with her foreignness as exoticism. As Jasmine creates new identities, she has to kill off past ones. Jyoti, and even Jasmine and Jane need to die for Jase to be born, and follow the adventurous trail further west: 'we murder who we were in order to be born again in the images of dreams' (p.29).

Jasmine's foreign past, true to Mukherjee's ethos expressed in 'Maximalists' ('Whatever we were raised with is in us already. It's in your eyes and ears and in some special categories of your brains' (p.29)), and in *Darkness* ('Indianness is now a metaphor, a particular way of partially comprehending the world' (p.4)), functions only as a peculiar vision, that she shares with her Vietnamese-American son, but does not quite communicate. Jasmine's relationship with Du has as much distance and misunderstanding as it does solidarity and identification. Watching the television broadcasts of Vietnamese boat-people, Jasmine is reminded of her own violent passage to America. She wishes to create a base of shared experiences with Du on the basis of their traumatic migration and their rural, deprived past, perhaps in order to find in him an outlet for her unexpressed, misunderstood foreignness. She is perceptive about the nuances of insult and insensitivity levelled at her in her Iowan farming community, at the hospital and at the university, but she never voices this perception, not even to Du. The irony of the discrepancy between her private and public selves is apparent to herself only. Du, however, is uncooperative: 'that's wild. Can I go now?' (p.18) is his standard response to Jasmine's attempts. Working together on one of his electrical projects, they compare notes in code:

"I've also killed a man, you know. There's nothing in the world that's too terrible."

I drop a second bead on the next connection.

"I know," he says. "So have I. More than one" (p.157).

In the character of Du, the novel acknowledges a different way of being a minority, and no less American for that. Jasmine has adopted a generic American accent 'like the voices on the telephone... Du says they're computer generated,' whereas Du's English is 'fluent, but with a permanent accent. 'Like Kissinger,' he says' (p.13). The enigmatic Du,

the 'quick study' (pp.28-29) who learned American ways faster than Jasmine, whose genius in electrics and 'wirings and circuits were as close to Vijn & Vijn [Jasmine] as would ever get' (p.223) has, unbeknownst to his new family, kept Vietnamese connections, and abruptly leaves Iowa to join his sister in LA. Jasmine realises that Du had a Vietnamese life of which she 'hadn't had a clue:'

My transformation has been genetic; Du's was hyphenated. We were so full of wonder at how fast he became American, but he's a hybrid, like the fantasy appliances he wants to build. His high-school paper did a story on him titled: "Du (Yogi) Ripplemeyer, a Vietnamese-American..." (p.222).

Unlike the self-murdering rebirths of Jyoti-Jasmine-Jazzy-Jane-Jase, Du preserves and connects, becoming a 'Vietnamese-American' with secret connections.

The status of Du and his style of Americanness can be somewhat hard to fathom in the novel. Jasmine proclaims him her 'hero,' 'his education was my education' (p.223). But his brand of semi-assimilation and community-based identity is what Mukherjee had claimed to oppose, and Jasmine perhaps agrees: 'I was afraid to test the delicate thread of his hyphenization. Vietnamese-American: don't question either half too hard' (p.225). Eng, and to a lesser extent, Blanquita and Ro in *Middleman*, are enigmatic, their motivation unreachable or misunderstood by the narrators. The short stories make their point precisely by showcasing this lack of understanding and stereotyping, and function as a careful device for an ironic exposition of the narrative voices of America.

In the *Bazaar* interview, Mukherjee comments that she had fallen a little in love with the character of Du, who 'never yields the secret core of himself' (p.9). This could be his secret core of Vietnamese identity that he does not sacrifice as Jasmine does on the altar

of Americanness. Or perhaps, his secret core is an immigrant identity of a kind that the narrative gaze of the novel is unable to fathom: he is unreachable by a writer whose 'history mandated training' to see herself 'as the 'other" ('Maximalists,' p.29) can account for Jasmine, only because she is constituted as a series of generic simulacra. But Blanquita, Eng, Ro, Du and all the other immigrant underclass figures cannot have their voices restored to them by a writer who chooses to conceive of foreignness only as metaphor: they will be gazed at, guiltily and admiringly.

NOTES

1. Bharati Mukherjee, 'Immigrant Writing: Give Us Your Maximalists!' in *New York Times Book Review*, 28 August 1988, pp.1 and 28-9.
2. Bharati Mukherjee, *Darkness* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1985), and Bharati Mukherjee and Clark Blaise, *Days and Nights in Calcutta*, (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1986). Further references to both works are in the text.
3. Terry Eagleton, *Exiles and Emigres: Studies in Modern Literature* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970).
4. Andrew Gurr, *Writers in Exile: The Identity of Home in Modern Literature* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1981), p.7. Further references are in the text.
5. Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith,' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.393-414 (p.394).
6. Uma Parameswaran, 'What Price Expatriation?' in *Commonwealth Writer Overseas:: Themes of Exile and Expatriation*, Alastair Niven, ed., (Brussels: M. Didier, 1976), pp.41-52 (p.41). Further references are in the text.
7. Bharati Mukherjee, *The Tiger's Daughter* (London: Fawcett Crest, 1973), *Wife* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1987), and *Jasmine* (London: Virago Press, 1991). Further references to Mukherjee's novels are in the text.
8. Quoted in Susheila Nasta, 'Re-mapping Literature: New Fictions in English 1991-2,' *British Book News* (February 1993), pp.72-77 (p.74).
9. Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (London: Hamilton, 1986).
10. Sue Spearey, in an unpublished paper presented at the April 1992 British Association for Canadian Studies Conference, *Difference and Community*, titled 'Habitations and Homelands in the Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee' includes a lengthy discussion of the ironised processes of assimilation in 'Orbiting,' and concludes, 'the America Mukherjee evokes is not without its paradoxes and contradictions, but is nonetheless a nation in which rituals and traditions can be transformed or accrue new meanings through the spatial practices of its immigrants, past and present' (pp.7-8).
11. Anindyo Roy, for example, observes that Mukherjee's writing 'fosters... a peculiar relationship of identification and misidentification - between the immigrant writer as the holder of an urban cosmopolitan ethos and the immigrant protagonist as a Third World subject pursuing the dream of cosmopolitan romanticism.' Anindyo Roy, 'The Aesthetics of An (Un)willing Immigrant: Bharati Mukherjee's *Days and Nights in Calcutta* and *Jasmine*,' in Emmanuel S. Nelson, ed., *Bharati Mukherjee: Critical Perspectives* (New York: Garland, 1993), p.132.
12. Michael Connell, Jessie Grearson and Tom Grimes, 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee,' *Iowa Review* 20. no.3 (1990), pp.26-27. As quoted in Judie Newman, 'The

Madwoman in the Motel: Bharati Mukherjee, 'Jasmine and *Jasmine*,' in *The Ballistic Bard: Postcolonial Fictions* (London: Arnold, 1995), pp.144-72 (p.146).

13. Bharati Mukherjee, 'Jasmine,' in *The Middleman and Other Stories* (New York: Ballantine, 1988), p.135.

14. Judie Newman, 'The Madwoman in the Motel,' p.147.

15. Bharati Mukherjee, 'When in America,' *Bazaar: South Asian Arts Magazine* 13 (1990), pp.8-9 (p.8). Further references are in the text.

16. Scott F. Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p.95.

17. *Jasmine* has precedents in *Middleman* in this respect too. In 'Jasmine,' the heroine is contemptuous of the prettiness of money in Trinidad: 'back home at work, she used to count out thousands of Trinidad dollars everyday and not even think of them as real. Real money was worn and green, American dollars' (p.124). In 'Fighting for the Rebound' Blanquita 'likes to act as though real life began for her at JFK when she got past the customs and immigration' (p.79). In 'The Tenant' Maya refers to her disrupted but unassimilated life in America as 'dead space' (p.112) similar to Jasmine's experience of 'unreal time' in the ghetto.

18. Alison Carb, 'An Interview with Bharati Mukherjee,' *The Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1988), pp.645-54 (p.653). Further references are in the text.

19. Interviewed by Jonathan Rutherford, Bhabha offers the following elaboration of the idea of translation as mimicry: 'translation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense - imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into simulacrum and so on: the 'original' is never finished or complete in itself.' 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha,' in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), pp.207-21 (p.210).

20. C. Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p.284. For further discussion of this novel, see Conclusion.

CHAPTER III: HANIF KUREISHI: JOURNALISTS, INTRUDERS AND CONFIDANTS

The immigrant writer inevitably finds himself in the position of representing the marginalised immigrant community to the dominant one through his or her fiction. This act of representation in itself establishes a power relationship, in which the marginalised is offered to the judgmental gaze of the white audience, and rendered vulnerable. This position of 'speaking for' results in a friction between the immigrant writer and the community, a friction, as was so publicly illustrated by what we now call the 'Rushdie affair,' that is at once the problem of the relation that the fictional representation bears to the reality of immigrant experience, and, possibly as a result of this, the relationship of the writer himself with the community. The accuracy and fairness of such representations can be, and is, challenged by questioning the extent to which these are bound to be an imposition of the typically Western-educated and probably well-assimilated immigrant intellectual's views, arguably bordering on a new Orientalism. This not surprisingly results in a highly ironic and conflicting relationship between the published voice of the immigrant writer and the voicelessness of the community he seeks to represent - is he looked up to, or resented, is he an outsider to the community, or an articulate insider? In what cases does the community encourage and give him licence to voice his representation in his fiction, and when are these representations denied and rejected as false, offensive, a manipulation, or even worse, exploitation?

Two 'immigrant' commentators on the Rushdie affair, Yasmin Alibhai and Edward Said, though they delivered different final judgments on the author's culpability, highlighted the importance of the writer's relationship with, and moral and political responsibility

towards, his vulnerable community. Both quotations emphasise the vulnerability of a minority, here the Muslim community in Britain. Yasmin Alibhai, in her essay 'Beyond Belief' which appeared in the *New Statesman and Society* in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair, commented on the community pressure on the minority writer's conscience:

In a society that still thrives on a colonial relationship with its own non-white populations, the dangers of black artists being flattered, appropriated and used are real. On the other hand, when you come from a group of people denied even basic human rights, their expectations of you are high and political.¹

This fragile balance that black artists are obliged to tread, according to Yasmin Alibhai, is the reason for the sense of 'dismay and betrayal' aroused by *The Satanic Verses* as well as, though not as strongly, by the writing of other British Asian authors.² Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Launderette* has been seen to present an insider's view of the so-called 'ghetto' and interpreted to be, to say the least, an unflattering picture of it.³ In his study of Black British cinema, Kobena Mercer notes the hostile reception of the film, in terminology akin to that used in Malise Ruthven's and Aziz al-Azmeh's discussions of the reaction to *The Satanic Verses*:

Among British Asian Communities, angry reactions focussed on the less than favorable depictions of some of the Asian characters which, when read as emblematic of the community, were seen as replaying certain racist stereotypes. Describing its portrayal of Pakistani shopkeepers and drug-dealers as a form of "neoorientalism," independent producer Mahmood Jamal argued that this term described "Asian intellectuals... laundered by the British University system... [who] reinforce stereotypes of their own people for a few cheap laughs" (*ICA*, 1988:21).⁴

Visiting Bradford well after the success of *My Beautiful Launderette*, Kureishi writes of an encounter with 'a young Asian man, an activist and local political star.' Though Kureishi greets the young activist 'enthusiastically,' his enthusiasm is not returned - as

the writer of that film, he finds himself condemned as 'a fascist, a reactionary,' and nearly physically assaulted.⁵ Part of Rushdie's apologia, after the violent reaction to his novel, was to attest that he had not realised the extent of the 'hurt' his novel was likely to cause, though he had, of course, known that it would elicit a strong reaction from the community. This was his defence against the argument that said he knew what he was doing, therefore had to put up with the result - but it seems he did not know, as he had not yet realised the extent of the possessive love and hate relationship between the community and the writer.

Representation and exploitation seem to be divided by very thin lines in immigrant writing: especially after the Rushdie affair, even the more socially conscious option of offering 'positive' representations of immigrant communities, or attempting to 'educate,' directly or indirectly, the white population, seems to have become open to attack as, and indistinguishable from, shameless exploitation. The publication of *The Satanic Verses* resulted in Rushdie's alienation from the Muslim Asian community. He was attacked as an exploiter, an 'Orientalist,' a blasphemer, even as he was trying to celebrate, in his novel, an image of the immigrant community as hybrid, plural and multi-cultural. These are all words uttered frequently and with great approval by Rushdie himself, both in fiction and in essays, but as we witnessed so violently during the Rushdie affair, they did not find anything near approval when met by the people whom these words were meant to describe and celebrate. The eternal impasse is that the immigrant writer often describes the community in a way which is prescribed by his or her own background and education, as is evident, for example, in Rushdie's insistence on multi-culturalism, and the important part that the Indian subcontinent plays in his fiction, and just as evident in the tales of suburbia and the emphasis on the 'Britishness' of the characters in the fiction

of some second-generation immigrant writers. In the work of Hanif Kureishi, and a less well-known novelist, Atima Srivastava, race and class are ultimately inseparable, and the issues of 'unemployment, or racism, or housing' are seen through what Kureishi himself termed the 'inescapable British framework of class.'⁶

Salman Rushdie has often been accused of taking advantage of his intimate knowledge of ethnic communities, a view most authoritatively expressed by Edward Said, who, shortly after the eruption of the Rushdie affair, explained the nature of the grievance against *The Satanic Verses*:

Above, all, however, there rises the question that people from the Islamic world ask: Why must a Moslem, who could be defending and sympathetically interpreting us, now represent us so roughly, so expertly and so disrespectfully to an audience already primed to excoriate our tradition, reality, history, religion, language and origin? Why, in other words, must a member of our culture join the legions of Orientalists in Orientalizing Islam so radically and unfairly?... The book, like its author, was situated in 'history', and should not have ignored the political reality of the contemporary world, in which Islam felt under siege and needed a critical, but sympathetic, interpretation.⁷

Whether or not one agrees with this formula and the harshness of the diagnosis that, in writing the way he did, Rushdie 'joined the legions of Orientalists,' the criticism is certainly one that would sound familiar to other immigrant writers. Writing about 'their own kind' places writers of Asian origin under the spotlight in several ways. The Western 'mainstream' readership tends to pigeonhole them, and regard their writing as cultural representation of sociological interest, and even, not uncommonly, looks for criticism and condemnation of the marginalised culture, which is found additionally satisfactory as coming from a member of that culture. Such was some initial Western reaction to *The Satanic Verses* when Salman Rushdie, 'a Muslim himself,' revealed the corruption of

Islam. This, of course, is precisely the fear expressed by Said, and it did find partial confirmation during the Rushdie affair. This increases the already heavy weight on the immigrant writer's shoulders, by making it inevitable that their writing will be regarded as 'representative,' whether or not it makes such claims. The problem is insurmountable. The resentment against being regarded in such a reductionist light, juxtaposed with the inevitable restrictions of the fear of harming the delicate balances of 'the political reality of the contemporary world' in the direct and literal way that *The Satanic Verses* did, forms one of the undercurrents of black and minority writing today. In 'Dirty Washing,' which he wrote after the release of *My Beautiful Launderette*, Kureishi identifies this as a new issue:

The difficult moral position of the writer from an oppressed or persecuted community and the relation of that writing to the rest of society, is a relatively new one in England. But it will arise more and more, as British writers with some colonial heritage start to declare themselves.⁸

Kureishi is unhappily aware of exactly such a difficult moral position, and the existence of such high and political expectations of his writing, and he struggles against it in his fiction. Talking about the reactions to his first film, *My Beautiful Launderette*, in the diary he kept during the filming of his next film, *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, Kureishi remarked on his situation as an Asian writer in Britain, where, because he portrayed, in a Godfather-like movie, Asian drug-dealers, adulterers, alcoholics and most scandalously of all, homosexuals, he was accused of 'selling out.' He expresses his frustration with the mentality that expects him to produce a 'positive image. It requires useful lies and cheering fictions: the writer as public relations officer, as hired liar.'⁹ Against this Kureishi posits not only his freedom of speech, his authorial liberty to remain above the

political effects of his imaginative creation, but he questions, in 'Dirty Washing,' the very effectuality in fiction of such facile political correctness:

I'm glad to say that the more I looked at 'My Beautiful Launderette', the less 'positive images' I could see. If there is to be a serious attempt to understand present day Britain, with its mix of races and colours, its hysteria and despair, then writing about it has to be complex. It can't apologise or idealise (p.26).

Though in this particular instance Kureishi seems to defend the higher value of imaginative complexity and truthfulness over a reductive role as a community representative, his fiction shuffles uncomfortably around the issue. In one particular scene in *My Beautiful Launderette* we find an ironic echo of Kureishi's unwillingness to act as a public relations officer, in the words of a character with quite another agenda: Nasser, Omar's rich uncle, has employed his white ex-skinhead lover, Johnny, to 'unscrew,' to throw out squatters from a block of flats he owns. Johnny, who is trying to go straight with the job in Omar's laundry, is clearly uncomfortable with being typecast as the thug, and asks Nasser: 'Aren't you giving ammunition to your enemies doing this kind of... unscrewing? To people who say Pakis just come here to hustle other people's lives and jobs and houses?' Nasser's answer is one of the funniest lines in the script, and certainly one of the most memorable Kureishi has written: 'But we're professional businessmen. Not professional Pakistanis. There's no race question in the new enterprise culture' (p.82). A disturbing problem emerges below the joviality and charm of this scene: though Kureishi would agree with the feeling that he is not obliged to be a 'professional Pakistani,' he would hardly like to identify himself with the 'new enterprise culture,' and would presumably wish to differentiate between a professional businessman and a professional writer. While uncle Nasser might be comfortable with the amorality of the immigrant businessman buying into a Thatcherite 'new enterprise' ethos, an

immigrant writer must necessarily assume a 'moral' stance in his dealings with the immigrant and the British worlds.

It is this question of morality that constitutes a major theme in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, where Karim struggles with the question of a moral identity, while he tries to 'locate [him]self and learn where the heart is,' and achieve success in a white world.¹⁰ This wish to get ahead, be accepted into the dominant white centre of British society, either as a 'professional businessman' or as an artist, is frequently represented in immigrant writing in conflict with the pull towards communal responsibility. The inherent guilt in the process of assimilation becomes apparent as time and again the assimilated character, in many cases closely modelled on the author, is portrayed as a yuppie, a Thatcherite, and again almost always, apolitical. Kureishi himself created several characters of this ilk; the heroine of Srivastava's *Transmission*, Angie, faces censure from her politically-conscious black social worker friend, Maggie, because of her own lack of involvement with race and class after her entry into the media world;¹¹ Rushdie's Chamcha snobbishly looks down on what he sees as the uncultured crudeness of the race rallies that his wife and best friend attend. However much the writer might resent the accusation of 'selling-out,' the figure of the immigrant who sells out seems to lurk guiltily in the fiction.

One such character is Asif in *Birds of Passage*, a play that Kureishi wrote in 1983.¹² A wealthy Indian student who spends his time drinking and gambling rather than studying for his engineering exams, Asif is a lodger with an English family in a London suburb. The play focusses on the dissolution of the family financially and emotionally. We see Asif rising in status as he buys the house he lodged in, and offers demeaning construction jobs to the people who had formerly treated him with racist condescension. Like uncle

Nasser in *My Beautiful Launderette*, Asif is a believer in the equalising effect of the 'new enterprise culture' and the power of finance. When asked by his English friend Paul whether he realises that by emigrating to England he is committing himself to a life 'in the middle of a racial whirlpool,' Asif replies:

The whirlpool is between your ears. And we don't need your help. We'll protect ourselves against boots with our brains. We won't be on the street because we'll be in cars. We won't be throwing bricks because we'll be building houses with them. They won't abuse us in factories because we'll own the factories and we'll sack people (p.215).

My Beautiful Launderette is based on the dynamics of a similarly changing race and power relationship, the ethos of racial salvation achieved through financial solvency. Omar is an infinitely more likeable character than Asif, partly because of his apparent desperation to break out of the claustrophobia of his life in the suburbs, and partly for the romance of his relationship with Johnny, his childhood best friend, now a quietly repentant ex-skinhead. Omar's philosophy of survivalism, of assimilation through Thatcherism, however, seems to be the same as Asif's, as he ignores the pleas of his socialist alcoholic ex-journalist father for him to study and politicise himself ('You've got to study. We are under siege from the white man. For us education is power' (p.59)) and gets involved in the crooked business dealings of his Godfather-like extended family instead. Omar acquires the money to completely restore a dilapidated launderette through stealing and selling drugs, and employs Johnny as a handy-man assistant, thus reversing the balance of power between them: he is no longer 'kicked... all round the place' by the former racist marcher Johnny, but dominates him financially: 'And what are you doing now? Washing my floor. That's the way I like it. Now get to work... Or you're fired!' (p.92). The film manipulates the class basis of discrimination: Kureishi experiments with mixtures of race and class, and by reversing the class roles of Johnny and Omar reverses

the class superiority of the British over the natives in the colonial context, and its assumed overspill into contemporary Britain, where colonial attitudes still persist.

But this is not only a question of domination: Omar's relationship with Johnny is also a love affair, which Kureishi once described as a modern Romeo and Juliet. The love affair with an ex-skinhead, repeated in Srivastava's *Transmission*, is arguably an attempt to come to terms with the uglier implications of assimilating into a society that has treated one's community and culture in such evil ways. But both works seem to avoid fully confronting the issue by portraying Johnny and Lol, ex-skinhead paki-bashers both, as repentant figures, fully reciprocating the love they are offered. *My Beautiful Launderette*, and *Transmission* are, for all their awareness of issues of cross-racial desire, still fictions that look up to their English love-objects, both in their beauty and their wisdom.

Karim's desire for Charlie in *The Buddha of Suburbia* is a more complex representation. Charlie remains amoral and unreachable throughout the novel, a negative role model embodying Karim's wish for assimilation in his dynamic ability to transform and place himself at the centre, and in the amorality of his sordid, but glamorous, existence. Karim's desire for the white body of Charlie is cultural as well as sexual. Charlie's features are sharp and beautiful as much as his image is changeable and fashionably objectified. Karim tries to follow his chameleonic changes, but ends up merely a pale echo or a caricature. Where Charlie's white body is an object of desire, Karim's brown one is frequently degraded: in performances he is smeared with 'shit-brown cream' (p.146), displayed semi-naked in a loin-cloth; he is subjected to sexual degradation repeatedly, in ways not even his own sense of sexual adventurousness can ease: by the dog of a racist with whose daughter he had a sexual relationship, and by Pyke and

Marlene, his director and his wife. Though Karim tries to dress in the uniforms of fashionable London, usually modelled on Charlie's fashion sense, his body-image is never far from Anwar and Changez, both of whom he represents on stage - one a crippled, grossly overweight figure whom Karim forces to put the hood of his jacket on when they are together, and the other an old man, starving himself, filthy in his own urine.

Hanif Kureishi was already a prolific playwright before he became well-known with *My Beautiful Launderette*. The subject of 'race' is conspicuously absent from his early writing, but the second of his twin topics, class, studied from the point of view of an intense suburban malaise and restlessness prevails. An early play like *The King and Me* gives no clues as to the colour of the writer.¹³ What we do get, is a strong sense of Britishness, and the kind of subject that caused a newspaper columnist to accuse Kureishi of being 'hipper than thou,' after his last film, *London Kills Me*.¹⁴ The play deals with the parochial obsession of a working-class English woman with her Elvis memorabilia, to the extent that listening to Elvis records takes over her life, and her sole ambition is for her husband, whom she forces to enter Elvis look-alike contests, to win tickets to Graceland in a competition. This is clearly a writer at home with British cultural icons, but as he admits in his introduction to the 1981 edition of his first 'Asian' play, *Borderline*, he was uncomfortable with the idea of a project about Asian immigrants in Britain, as he was 'afraid of being asked to write outside [his] own experience,' of having to represent a community that he did not entirely feel part of.¹⁵

Despite this discomfort on Kureishi's part, *Borderline* is a literal and earnest attempt at representing the Asian community on stage, with the explicit purpose of, in whatever

minimal sense, 'educating' people about this 'other' culture living in their midst. An experimental project with the Joint Stock Theatre Group, the originary idea behind the project was for members of the cast and the writer, in this case Kureishi, to research around a certain topic, here the Sikh community of Southall, and through discussions and improvisations in a series of workshops, characters would emerge, around which, and keeping in mind the already chosen members of the cast, the commissioned writer was expected to write a play in ten weeks. Kureishi describes the purpose of this working method as 'producing a well-informed drama about contemporary events, a mixture of information about the state of things, polemical journalism and the theatre' (p.4). He also admits to finding the use of journalistic research 'as the tool for a different form, art or theatre,' an 'impossible idea' with hindsight, even though the technique of active journalistic research and interview, 'of finding out about the world and reflecting it' (p.4) was a method he continued to use, especially, and controversially, when he was writing the script of and later directing, *London Kills Me*. In his article, 'Whose Life is it Anyway?' Alex Kershaw interviews Glyn Roberts, the young drug-dealer upon whose life in a Notting Hill squat Kureishi based his film 'which purport[s] to speak for the underclass while appealing to a Saturday-night Odeon crowd' and claims that Kureishi 'now faces exposure as one of the very bourgeois liberals he claims to despise.' Roberts himself has no doubt that he has been 'exploited,' remarking that Kureishi 'was always taking notes on what I was doing,' and was instrumental in making him hastily sign a contract waiving his rights over the story for one pound.¹⁶

In the introduction to *Borderline*, Kureishi says that during the research period, the actor-researchers of the Joint Stock Theatre Group were like 'journalists... also intruders and sometimes confidants' (p.4). The inseparability of these roles is reflected in the play that

came about as a result of the group's own research, where, in the character of Susan, the journalist researching in Southall for a television program on British Asians, Kureishi explores the role of the outsider intruder-cum-confidante in self-accusatory tones. Susan moves in and out of the houses of the immigrant families and, gaining their confidence, becomes privy to their private thoughts and doubts. In trying to act as an objective observer, She unwittingly acts as a catalyst, especially in the case of Banoo, a middle-aged housewife whose hitherto unexpressed disillusionment with her life in England and fears about her daughter becoming 'too English' (p.129) and confused, become intensified as they are recorded on Susan's tapes. Though Susan is well-liked by the local families who invite her into their houses to talk, she is met with a distrustful silent hostility by the youth movement in the neighbourhood, especially their militant leader, Anwar. Against Susan's defence that 'I do believe that it is possible to be honest and accurate about other people's experience,' and that her project is 'socially useful,' Anwar argues: 'you change its nature as it passes through your hands'. But his objection to Susan's research goes further than a failure of representation:

You take our voice. Use our voice. Annex our cause... Because you like a cause don't you... Now for a few days you have borrowed our little worry... For a start don't think you can represent us truly... You take our voice. Replace it with your own (pp.23-24).

The revelation that Kureishi and his Joint Stock colleagues researched for this play in exactly the same way as Susan does for her socially useful programme gives the scene a confessional, self-reflexive tone. It thus seems that Kureishi accuses himself, as a second generation immigrant writer, of playing the role of the intruding outsider into the lives of the Asian immigrants he writes about, and the method of journalistic research

becomes a symbol, in Kureishi's work, of this guilty intrusion and its inevitable manipulation.

It is ironic to see the furore caused over Kureishi's alleged exploitation of Glynn Roberts, his source, in *London Kills Me*, after a prolific output of plays, scripts and a novel in which he had agonised over the possibility, even inevitability of exploitation when writing about the immigrant community. But it is equally ironic and significant that Kureishi chose to use the method of journalistic probing, to the extent of taking notes while they spoke, throughout the course of his friendship with this young white squatter, after devoting much of his fiction to exploring and criticising the exploitative overtones of the method.

In his diary of the filming of *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*, Kureishi admitted to a sneaky fear that his writing and the films that emerge from it amounted to 'a kind of social voyeurism' consisting of 'middle class people... who own and control and have access to the media and money, using minority and working-class people to entertain other middle-class people' (p.102). Juxtaposed with this representation of the journalistic/writerly gaze, *Borderline* reveals an ambivalent admiration towards political activism, in the figures of Anwar and Yasmin. Their voices are contrasted not simply with Susan's, but Haroon's as well, another character into whose struggle it is possible to read traces of Kureishi's writerly dilemma: Haroon, who is writing a novel, 'subtle with suffering,' wants to go 'miles away' from the oppressive claustrophobia of his suburban community, to college. His reaction to the conflicts in his environment is to retreat into a kind of microcosmic privacy, nurturing his ambition to get away from the community in order

to avoid its conflicts. He is unable ultimately to achieve this avoidance of the larger political forces governing his life, as another youth leader, Yasmin, foresees:

I understand what you're going through because it's happened to me. You've taken all the conflicts inside yourself. But you can't live like that, as if race and contempt and all that was some kind of personal problem you can work through on your own. It'll tear you apart in the end. No, we've got to organise and retaliate (p.33).

Borderline ends in a reconciliatory tone, and with a qualified acceptance of Yasmin's point of view that the way out of the impasse is to get political. Haroon is admonished by Yasmin and gives in to her certainty, but his introverted agonising and the 'deep' novel we do not get to read are perhaps the emotional centres of the play.

The Buddha of Suburbia creates a similar tension between the shifting images and allegiances of Karim, and the political principles governing his feminist cousin, Jamila, whom Karim uses as his political barometer and touchstone:

Her feminism, the sense of self and fight it engendered, the schemes and plans she had, the relationships - which she desired to take this form and not that form - the things she had made herself know, and all the understanding this gave, seemed to illuminate her tonight as she went forward, an Indian woman, to live a useful life in white England (p.216).

Jamila is a black woman, a socialist and a feminist, in distinctly labelled identities - even her existential crisis as an adolescent is so clearly defined as to be channelled through politicised jargon: rebelling against the librarian who gave her French literature to read but 'talked to [her] parents as if they were peasants' and '[forgot] that she was Indian,' Jamila drives Karim 'mad by saying Miss Cutmore had colonized her' (p.52). When Jamila finds expression through the media, it is by making documentaries, whereas

Karim inhabits the much more shifting ground of theatre and acting - his documenting is conflicted and ambivalent, his morality more complex.

In the picaresque of the partially autobiographical character of Karim, we see elements of both Susan's guilt and Haroon's tendency to internalise, further highlighting the issue of exploitation. Unlike the clear-cut self-image projected by Jamila, Karim's self-identification is half a page of half-description and qualification. His reluctant quest for identity works negatively, as he negotiates his way by colliding with definitions of what he is not. He lives in a world of changing images - clothes, songs, books and acting parts he tries on and discards in quick succession, with varying degrees of conviction and success.

The Buddha of Suburbia opens with Karim introducing himself with a frivolous-sounding statement, which nevertheless sums up Kureishi's approach to second generation immigrant reality in England.:

My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost. I am often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories. But I don't care - Englishman I am (though not proud of it), from the South London suburbs and going somewhere. Perhaps it is the odd mixture of continents and blood, of here and there, of belonging and not, that makes me restless and easily bored. Or perhaps it was being brought up in the suburbs that did it (p.3).

Typically of Kureishi's fiction, as well as Srivastava's, there is here an almost apologetic approach to 'immigrant' subjecthood, in the constant intertwining of racial identification with references to class. Karim hints at his complicated ethnic and cultural background, but within a sentence he shrinks away from the grand generalisations of old continents

and histories, and offers the more mundane, and more British, explanation of a suburban background instead. The same reticence in laying claim to the grandeur and vastness of another past, or even to the position of the victim as an Asian immigrant in British society, is present in *Transmission*. Like Karim, Angie finds it easier and more credible to describe her position in society in terms of being from North London and from a certain income bracket. She is happier in the part of a girl from Finchley, who is seen as a 'girl in a hurry who never stopped dropping aitches and tee's [but] was actually a graduate of literature' (p.16) in the television circles where she works, but is aware of the distance between herself and the more intense foreignness of her immigrant parents. While they might feel like outcasts because of a clash of cultures, she is more aware of her class in her effort to fit into the media/advertising world as an aspiring 'upwardly-mobile' woman. Both Karim and Angie feel they are a product of their class: it is their income bracket and particular accents that explain them, rather than their ethnic background.

Though he is in the theatre, Karim is still an example of the self-help survivalist Pakistani, and his struggle to get ahead in the bright lights of London has Thatcherite overtones, as did Omar's path to financial and sexual freedom in *My Beautiful Launderette*. Srivastava's protagonist is aware that she is making similar, politically questionable choices. Both novels display a class basis to assimilation, as the British-raised Asian characters struggle to reconstruct themselves into the professions and fashions of the dominant culture, but this is constantly twinned with the fear of exploiting the intimate knowledge of their communities for furthering their careers in the 'mainstream' world. In Angie's case, the feeling of guilt in her emotional detachment from her 'Asian' family and in joining the fashionable world of the media (a move up or

towards the 'centre,' both from the dreary suburban world and out of her racial identification to a more anonymously 'yuppie' existence) is twinned with her anxiety of joining the sort of middle class media establishment that Kureishi feared exploited working-class subjects for entertainment: her studio is preparing a film on a working-class HIV infected woman, Kathi, whom Angie has contacted through mutual friends, whom she interviews, and persuades to sign a contract waiving her rights to the finished product. At the end of the novel, she seeks redemption by stealing the only copy of the interview video, and dropping it off at Kathi's, who now has full-blown AIDS, with the note 'this belongs to you' (p.260). Another one-time novelist, Farhana Shaikh, creates the perfect allegory in her novel *The Red Box*, by putting her narrator Raisa, the educated daughter of a well-off Pakistani expatriate family, in contact with two Asian teenagers in a comprehensive school in a deprived area of London.¹⁷ Raisa is a postgraduate student in education, and her weekly taped interviews with Tahira and Nasreen constitute the basis of her research. Raisa describes her topic as trying 'to understand identity, I mean, I want to understand who we are, we - Pakistani girls and women in England... How we live, what we think is important, what we suffer, how we fight back' (p.142), though she does feel nervous and embarrassed in enveloping herself and her interviewees under the common pronoun 'we.' For the duration of her research, Raisa tries to discover what she has in common with the girls, a wider sense of Pakistani identity, but she is aware that the girls reason in the opposite direction, resentfully pointing out their differences, and suspicious of Raisa's motives in conducting her research at all.

The suburban protagonist of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, despite his involvement with the theatre, is yet another example of the amoral self-help survivalist Pakistani. Here, the self-reflexiveness is perhaps clearer, since Karim's realm is not financial, but artistic: as

an actor, he is in the business of representation. Keen to enter the fascinating world of the city, Karim is introduced to a second-rate theatre director by his father's lover, which secures his entry into acting. His first part, to his horror, is the leading role in *The Jungle Book*: trying to find a social and racial identity, Karim takes refuge in what he sees as the land of arch-pretend, the theatre, only to find himself cast, 'for authenticity and not for experience' (p.147) as Mowgli in a loin-cloth, boot-polish make-up and a funny mock-Indian accent. He quickly overcomes his initial revulsion to the idea of being typecast in such a degrading way, however, as he 'relishes being the pivot of the production' (p.150) and the chance that this gives him of getting ahead in the acting profession. After seeing the play, Jamila tells him he should be ashamed of appearing in such a 'neo-fascist' production and asks: 'you've got no morality, have you? You'll get it later, I expect, when you can afford it' (p.157), a statement that proves partially true of the novel's ending.

The step up in Karim's career happens when he is asked to join the company of Matthew Pyke, a director who is the 'star of the flourishing alternative theatre scene' (p.159). The workshops and the production of a play with Pyke's group intensify Karim's involvement with the issue of artistic 'morality,' as he begins to acquire a sense of guilt towards his community, a member of which he is obliged to represent on stage. It is hard to judge how far the portrayal of Matthew Pyke and his alternative theatre group is meant to be a criticism of the time Kureishi himself spent with the Joint Stock Theatre group, but there certainly is a close parody of the methods of journalistic research and improvisation. This time the commissioned writer is an 'earnest and self-satisfied Northern woman' (p.167) and the subject which the actors are meant to research is, as Pyke puts it, 'the only subject there is in England... class' (p.164). Pyke encourages his

actors to 'research characters from different rungs of the social ladder' (p.170). But when Karim suggests that he wants to choose his school friend Charlie, suburban-boy-turned-cult-singer, Pyke discourages him immediately: 'We need someone from your own background... someone black' (p.170). Though Karim is far more likely to identify Charlie as 'someone from his own background,' than he would 'someone black,' his typecasting as a 'black' actor continues, from Mowgli to the token Asian in a politically-conscious play. Urged by Pyke to research someone from his own family - 'Uncles and aunts. They'll give the play a little variety. I bet they're fascinating' (p.170) - Karim decides to build his character on his uncle Anwar. Uncle Anwar and his wife Jeeta own a shop in which Karim spent much time with their daughter, Jamila, before his move away from the suburbs. Now, with the purpose of observing his uncle, who is deteriorating mentally and physically after the Indian husband he chose for his daughter turned out a disappointment, Karim returns daily to the shop he had abandoned for months, overcome by the excitement of moving away to the city. For a few weeks Karim follows Anwar around, going to the mosque with him, and generally acting the confidant to his increasing depression. Anwar's mental state deteriorates drastically after a racist attack in the shop, making him 'roam the streets' demented, waving his stick at white youths, 'beat me, white boy, if you want to!' Telling this to Karim makes Anwar's wife 'blush with shame and embarrassment,' but Karim decides this is 'just the thing' for his character sketch. He performs his 'monologue, saying who [Anwar] was, what he was like, followed by an imitation of him raving in the street.' But instead of the congratulatory reception he expects, he is faced with the consternation of the other 'minority' member of cast, Tracey, a black actress:

'What you want to say hurts me... And I am not sure we should show it!... I'm afraid it shows black people -'

'Indian people - '

'Black and Asian people - '

'One old Indian man - '

'As being irrational, ridiculous, as being hysterical. And as being fanatical.'

'Fanatical?' I appealed to the High Court. Judge Pyke was listening carefully. 'It's not a fanatical hunger-strike. It's calmly intended blackmail.'...

'... Your picture is what white people already think of us. That we're funny, with strange habits and weird customs. To the white man we're already people without humanity, and then you go and have Anwar madly waving his stick at the white boys. I can't believe that anything like this could happen. You show us as unorganized aggressors. Why do you hate yourself and all black people so much, Karim?' (p.180).

Karim here has to face the fact that his representation of members of his community will inevitably be seen as representative. Though he might intend his portrayal of Anwar's hunger strike to force his daughter into an arranged marriage as the psychological portrait of 'one old Indian man,' it will be received by the predominantly white audience as a representation of fanatical 'black' people. And such portrayals will also inevitably anger people in a similar sociological position, like Tracey, who argues that 'we have to protect our culture at this time' (p.181), who has 'high and political expectations,' in the same way that Edward Said argued that the representation of Islam in *The Satanic Verses* could be found unfair and harmful. Kureishi's position as to the culpability of Karim here is ambivalent: Karim's assertion that 'truth has a higher value' than Tracey's outright demand for 'the protection of our culture' sounds akin to Kureishi's own insistence that he will not be a public relations officer, a hired liar. But there is no doubt here that Tracey, who is 'dignified and serious' and 'worried about what it meant to be a black woman' (p.179) is shown to be morally superior to Karim, whose voyeuristic exploration of his uncle did border on exploitation. This exploitation Karim only becomes conscious of when his next research subject, Changez, the Indian man Anwar had selected to marry his daughter, extracts a promise that he won't 'try and steal' him to use him in his 'acting

business' (p.185). This makes Karim, a hitherto amoral character, ponder guiltily on his moral position:

If I defied Changez, if I started work on a character based on him, if I used the bastard, it meant that I was untrustworthy, a liar. But if I didn't use him it meant I had fuck-all to take to the group after the 'me-as-Anwar' fiasco. As I sat there I began to recognize that this was one of the first times in my life I'd been aware of having a moral dilemma. Before, I'd done exactly what I wanted; desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear (p.186).

But in spite of this pang of responsibility, Karim goes on to portray Changez, in a 'spirit of bloody-minded defiance' (p.189) both of his promise to Changez, and the criticism of Tracey. The result is a pretty outrageous, if non-violent, stereotype, complete with an accent 'which I knew would sound, to white ears, bizarre, funny and characteristic of India' and sexist sexual frustration: 'having been informed in Bombay... that you merely had to whisper the word 'undress' in England and white women would start slipping out of their underwear' (p.189). To his surprise, before Tracey can voice any of her objections, Pyke announces that the 'Tariq' character will be part of their play, locking Karim into the role of a ridiculous stereotype, and also showing almost allegorically the authority of the white judge/director in choosing the way the Asian character will be represented, regardless of the moral dilemmas and conflicts of Tracey or Karim.

This serves as apt commentary on Karim's illusion of choice and self-creation, once out of the suffocating limits of the suburbs and into the amorphous realm of the city, compounded by the representation of his sexuality. Karim is exuberantly bisexual, a condition of doubleness that could be compared to his racially double-barrelled existence, as the son of a Pakistani father and an English mother. But both conditions of plenty are undermined. Karim considers himself 'lucky that I could go to parties and go

home with anyone of either - not that I went to many parties, none at all really' (p.55). But his sexual options turn out to be as closely circumscribed as his acting choices: his two objects of desire, Charlie and Eleanor, are white, and represent unattainable Englishness at extremes. Eleanor is upper-middle class, and involved with a group of artists, among them a token Glaswegian who is regularly required to tell them about 'knife fights, Glasgow poverty and general loucheness and violence' (p.176). Karim's status no longer qualifies him to act out either racial or working class exotica, and he is crushed to find out that Eleanor had only slept with him when told to do so by Pyke, yet another directorial decision.

However, his demeaning caricature of an 'immigrant fresh from a small Indian town' proves not to be as separate from himself as he had imagined. Karim insists on 'assembling the costume [him]self' and wears what he considers outrageously tacky and quintessentially Indian-immigrant clothing in the play: 'high white platform boots, wide cherry flares that stuck to my arse like sweetpaper and flapped around my ankles, and a spotted white shirt' (p.220). But complimenting him on his performance, his mother is pleased that 'you weren't in a loin-cloth as usual... At least they let you wear your own clothes' (p.232). Changez, too, is complimentary: 'I am glad in your part you kept it fundamentally autobiographical and didn't try the leap of invention into my character' (p.231). This unwelcome realisation of how he appears to others, is compounded by his exclusion from the suburban Englishness of his mother, as he stands outside his childhood home and peers through the living room window to see his mother with her new boyfriend: 'he was a pale man and an Englishman. This was a surprise: somehow I'd expected an Indian to be sitting with her, and when there wasn't I felt disappointed in her, as if she'd let us down. She must have had enough of Indians' (p.270).

The Buddha of Suburbia ends on an inconclusive note. Karim is offered a job as the token Asian - the rebellious son of a shop-owner - in a soap opera. He takes his family out to celebrate, and sits happily at the family reunion, thinking 'what a mess everything had been, but that it wouldn't always be that way' (p.284). But in typical Kureishi fashion, this optimism is qualified by irony: the scene represents a materialistic contentment as much as it does emotional. Karim feels the 'pleasure of pleasing others' by offering them an expensive meal, 'especially as this was accompanied by money-power.' The only moral commitment Karim can subscribe to, after his 'struggle to locate myself and learn where the heart is,' is to hope that 'perhaps in the future I would live more deeply,' though even this sounds suspect, as Karim's moment of emotional contentment in this 'great, unsullied event' arrives only through financial gratification ('I was paying for them; they were grateful, they had to be; and they could no longer see me as a failure' (p.283)), and Jamila, pointedly, is not part of the extended family circle around the table.

The same, ultimately undermined scenes of reconciliation dog the endings of *Transmission*, as well as *The Red Box*. It is significant that several of these works end in scenes of reunion, that mimic images of extended, though unconventional family gatherings: the opening reception in *My Beautiful Launderette*; the family-and-friends dinner in *The Buddha of Suburbia*; Angie facing the depression of leaving her media job and her white lover, by getting together with her black friend Maggie; Ravinder Randhawa's *A Wicked Old Woman* ends with Asian women of many, conflicting, generations posing for a photograph in the community centre;¹⁸ and Raisa discovers an implausibly literal 'point of meeting' between her and the girls. *The Red Box* ends with Raisa's letter to Tahira and Nasreen, after the completion of her dissertation, telling them the story of her life in England, in a way that she hopes will show the 'points of meeting'

as well as the differences, for 'none of us can overlook either if we are to stand together against the injustices of our pasts and presents' (p.190). Despite this intent, Raisa, as well as her creator, show a tendency to emphasise the similarity over the difference: Raisa reveals that her mother had for years secretly worked in a sweat-shop, just like the mothers of Tahira and Nasreen. Through such an unrealistic device - that the wife of a very well-off Pakistani barrister could work in a sweat-shop, and keep it a secret from her family until after her death - Shaikh seems to avoid finally confronting the issues that she had developed throughout her novel, concerning the position of the assimilated immigrant in relation to his or her community, and fails, too, to fully extend the implications of such a relationship to comment on the authorial position of the immigrant writer. Such gestures of reconciliation sound unconvincing after a painstakingly development of themes of class and cultural difference between the author and the community, and of a relationship of resentment and exploitation.

In an interview with Sheila Johnston about his directorial debut, Kureishi claimed he 'felt after *The Buddha of Suburbia* that, for the time being, I didn't have any more to say on that subject.'¹⁹ The structure and concerns of *London Kills Me*, however, echo those of *My Beautiful Launderette* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*. Clint is a descendant of Omar and Karim, even though the writing might have moved away from the race-centred narratives of the former works. This is still the story of an amoral character who is trying to break out of his social dead-end and gain entry into the legitimate job market, which he can only achieve by exploiting and betraying the unconventional family of his drug-dealing posse. In the last scene, when we see Clint scrubbed up in white shirt and bow-tie, quietly and servilely taking orders in a yuppie cafe in London, his success is ambivalent, his restless liveliness and unconventional independence sacrificed.

It is, however, interesting to comment on the representation of race in the film, marginal to its aims as it may be. Kureishi's contention that he did not feel obliged, simply because he is a writer of colour, to dwell on issues of race might be seen as being borne out by the film, where Asian characters coexist with white ones, ostensibly with no commentary being passed on such coexistence. Clint's posse includes an Asian, played in the film by the actor who portrayed Karim in the BBC serialisation of *The Buddha of Suburbia*. It is, however, surely not too far-fetched to comment that, far from displaying authorly comfort in representing an Asian character as British with no reference to colour, the representation of 'Bike' attests to a different kind of discomfort that cannot be admitted in the text: he is silent.

NOTES

1. Yasmin Alibhai, 'Beyond Belief,' *New Statesman and Society* (15 February 1991), pp.17-18 (p.18).
2. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (New York and London: Viking/Penguin, 1988).
3. Hanif Kureishi, *My Beautiful Launderette and the Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986).
4. Kobena Mercer, *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp.72-3.
5. Hanif Kureishi, 'Bradford,' *Granta: In Trouble Again, A Special Issue of Travel Writing* 20 (Winter 1986), pp.147-70 (p.156).
6. Hanif Kureishi, Introduction to *London Kills Me* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.ix.
7. Edward Said, in Lisa Appignanesi and Sara Maitland, eds., *The Rushdie File* (London: Fourth Estate, 1989), pp.175-7 (p.176).
8. Hanif Kureishi, 'Dirty Washing,' *Time Out* 795 (November 14-20 1985), p.26. Further references are in the text.
9. Hanif Kureishi, 'Some Time with Stephen: A Diary,' in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid: The Script and The Diary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), pp.61-127 (p.65).
10. Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), p.284. Further references are in the text.
11. Atima Srivastava, *Transmission* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1992). Further references are in the text.
12. Hanif Kureishi, 'Birds of Passage,' in *Outskirts and Other Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp.169-219. Further references are in the text.
13. Hanif Kureishi, *The King and Me*, in *Outskirts and Other Plays*, pp.1-28.
14. Hanif Kureishi, *London Kills Me* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).
15. Hanif Kureishi, 'Author's Note,' in *Borderline* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.4. Further references are in the text.
16. Alex Kershaw, 'Whose Life is it Anyway,' *The Independent on Sunday* (3 November 1991), pp.22-26 (p.22).
17. Farhana Sheikh, *The Red Box* (London: Women's Press, 1991). Further references are in the text.
18. Ravinder Randhawa, *A Wicked Old Woman* (London: Women's Press, 1987).
19. Sheila Johnston, 'Plain Dealing,' *Independent* (7 March 1991), p.15.

CHAPTER IV:

MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN AND ITS TRAVELLING DESCENDANTS

Native-Aliens and Expatriates-in-Actuality:

The *Bookseller* correspondent at the Delhi Book Fair that took place between the 5th and 13th of February 1994 reports a lively exhibition that was an indication of the 'hunger for books in the sprawling and complicated Indian market.' Among several talks and seminars on various subjects, the reporter attends a 'lively closed session with authors, including Shoba De, India's answer to Jackie Collins, and Upamanayu Chatterjee.' Then he mentions, casually, what must have seemed to him the liveliest point in this 'lively' discussion:

Much teeth-gnashing ensued when a journalist asked if Indian authors felt defensive about writing in English. The panel agreed that before *Midnight's Children* was published in 1981 there had indeed been a feeling that it was less Indian to write in English, but that subsequently a new breed of writers had contributed to a flowering of Indian literature in the English language.¹

Two points of fact are taken for granted in this paragraph, both by the panel offering their opinion on the state of Indian writing in English, and by the reporter who is ready to accept the answer at face value: the undeniable fact of the antagonism that Indian writing in English suffered until recently; and the fact that Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* has changed the situation radically, making it acceptable, not 'less Indian,' for an Indian

to write in English.² What seems astonishing is that both of these facts are given equal weight, accepted as basic assumptions, facts to be taken for granted when discussing Indian literature in English today. Why is it that a book written by Rushdie, a British citizen who has visited the Indian subcontinent only on holidays since the age of fourteen, can make English acceptable as an Indian literary language? If the charge before *Midnight's Children* was that it was 'less Indian' to write in English, would it not be arguable that the masterful use of the medium by an immigrant writer whose links with Indianness are far from straightforward, might in some ways *confirm* the charge, rather than dispel it? It seems, despite all this, that Rushdie's influence on a 'new breed of writers' and his contribution to 'a flowering of Indian literature in the English language' are assumptions which have by now acquired the status of truisms.

On the other hand, this connection, the perceived affinity between the Indian writer in English, and immigrant writers such as Rushdie, is not novel, and has been cited in Indian literary critical circles before, albeit in support of different arguments. Uma Parameswaran's judgment of both these related groups in her essay 'What Price Expatriation' is characteristically harsh and less than hopeful about the future of the medium of English Indian writing.³ Her discussion of the new terms that she detects coming into common use in the discussion of Commonwealth Literature, terms such as 'expatriate sensibility,' is less than complimentary, questioning the currency as well as the future of the expatriate point of view, whose scope she perceives as increasingly narrow and narcissistic.

Parameswaran's argument is rooted in the belief that 'expatriate' writers (Santha Rama Rau, Dom Moraes, Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Saros Cowasjee and Balachandra Rajan are some of the names she includes in this group) are 'expatriates in actuality as they have long been in their way of life' (p.43). This expatriation of the soul, she argues, is rooted in 'native-alienation' since this class of intellectuals and writers are 'anglicized in their social, behavioural and educational patterns' (p.42). They have the double disadvantage of their own alienation, and the fact that they 'arouse a kind of antipathy in their countrymen' (p.44). The question of finding an audience is sharpened by the peculiar space that they occupy between cultures even if they live in India. Parameswaran comments insightfully that 'foreign critics are too ready to grant that the novel in question mirrors society, and native critics are sorely put out if it does not' (p.47). Though she points out the unfairness and double standards of such judgments and challenges the expectation that Third World authors are expected to provide a sociological commentary?' Parameswaran herself is less than certain about the value and scope of the literature produced by native-aliens and, especially, by expatriates. In most expatriate writers Parameswaran detects a refusal to let go of India, which she perceives as a debilitating disease, since 'a novelist who is estranged from the day-to-day living conditions of his characters and from the deeper consciousness of a society is automatically handicapped if he continues to set his stories in that society' (p.43). The charges levied against native aliens (that 'they live outside the mainstream of Indian life and therefore are not genuinely Indian; their portrayal of Indian society and traditions are not competent; they write in English and not in Indian English; their writing lacks Indian sensibility' (p.44)) apply even more forcefully to the expatriates who have lost 'first-hand knowledge of economic, political and social changes' (p.43) but are unable to

acknowledge it. Parameswaran goes on to observe that 'expatriates can use their own experience and first hand observation to reinforce their insight into inner and social alienation' (p.46), but argues that so far this has failed to get them out of the stalemate of their estrangement:

Separated by time and distance from their setting, they can gain objectivity and perspective. Often, though, we see that instead of objectivity there is a tendency to exaggerate, a leaning towards the over-idealization of nostalgia, or towards satire... There is a tendency to compartmentalize, categorize, label and explain (pp.46-7).

Clearly for Parameswaran, exile and expatriation, at least in the Indian context, are not the enriching, enabling literary experiences that they are often hailed as. The practical limits that an expatriate would need to impose on his fiction to avoid incongruity are shown to be all but crippling in her essay, where Parameswaran argues that the expatriate would either have to limit his or her scope to satire, use sheer fantasy or humour, or if wishing to write with any authenticity about the native land, write about their childhood, in which case the question of memory would prove problematic. Finally, she agrees with the diagnosis of Saros Cowasjee, who writes one of the other essays on expatriation in the collection, that 'the truly alienated can write only one story - the story of his own alienation,' the assumption being that this is an ultimately narcissistic and barren endeavour, that rootlessness and alienation are debilitating.⁴ Both ultimately agree that there is good reason for the charge that native-aliens and expatriates are doomed to be 'un-Indian,' even when they fight against it.

Given that Parameswaran is right in offering this as the prevalent mood of the literary criticism directed against the works of expatriates as well as 'native-aliens,' anglicised

and English-writing Indian writers, it is clear that a native Indian prejudice against the use of English continues to exist, traces of which can still be detected in the *Bookseller* commentator's observation that 'much teeth-gnashing ensued' after the question was asked about literature in English.

Salman Rushdie himself has shown his awareness of various points made by Parameswaran in her essay, and certainly includes himself among the numbers of the group of 'Indo-British' writers, that he sees as occupying a place within a worldwide 'English literature.' Just as Parameswaran blurred the distinctions between 'native-aliens' and expatriates, Rushdie seems to regard Indo-British writing as a phenomenon not limited to writers within the borders of India, but interprets the existence of writers like himself as an enlargement of an already existing school of Indian writing:

One of the interesting things about this diverse community [Indian writers in England] is that, as far as Indo-British fiction is concerned, its existence changes the ball game, because that fiction is in future going to come as much from addresses in London, Birmingham and Yorkshire as from Delhi or Bombay.⁵

While Parameswaran interprets the existence of expatriate writing as the extension of an already limited genre inevitably doomed to extinction through an imaginative barrenness, for Rushdie, Indian writers in England have the potential to change and therefore enrich the tradition of Indian literature in English:

One of the changes has to do with attitudes towards the use of English. Many have referred to the argument about the appropriateness of this language to Indian themes... We can't simply use the language in the way the British did; it needs remaking for our own purposes. Those of us who do use English do so in spite of our ambiguity towards it, or perhaps because of that, perhaps because we find in that linguistic struggle a reflection of other struggles taking place in the real world, struggles

between the cultures within ourselves and the influences at work upon our societies (p.17).

One thing that is deducible from this paragraph, and Rushdie's markedly different interpretation of the same basic assumption as Parameswaran's - that Indian writers in English, whether in India or abroad, share a similar set of concerns and face similar problems - is that Parameswaran (who, it has to be admitted, is playing at least partially the devil's advocate in her article, expounding the prevailing attitude of the Indian literary scene vis à vis such writers) and Rushdie are perhaps working with different notions of 'Indianness' in mind. Hence the discrepancy between the criticism that Indian writers who write in English are not Indian enough, 'do not have an Indian sensibility,' and Rushdie's contention that the use of the English language in fiction in certain ways is a *reflection* of Indianness, of contemporary Indian sensibility, as Rushdie, and an increasing number of emerging Indian writers in English see it.

Midnight's Children: India Through Travelled Eyes:

In fact, Rushdie in *Midnight's Children* does employ all the strategies that Parameswaran argues are the only, limited options that are open to writers of his ilk, by using 'satire' and 'fantasy' and basing his plot around the Bombay of his own childhood. Parameswaran's misgiving had been that such a work would either have to move in the flimsy world of 'sheer fantasy' or, even worse, that its attempt at authenticity by returning to the familiar ground of childhood would backfire, as memory would prove 'problematic' in such an endeavour. Rushdie in 'Imaginary Homelands' claims to have faced the problem during

the writing of *Midnight's Children*, and to have discovered that his version of post-independence India could only be 'a novel of memory and about memory, so that my India was just that: 'my' India, a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions' (p.10). Likewise Saros Cowasjee's diagnosis that the expatriate writer could only write one story and that the story of his own alienation, is perceptive of the thrust of 'expatriate' writing, but underestimates the result and its relevance to contemporary Indian reality and literature. In his authorial stance Rushdie emphasises his peripherality to Indian history, but is not unaware that his marginality is not necessarily that of powerlessness, but of elitism and privilege. His narrative carries the guilt of the elitist power that his very attempt to encompass a slice of Indian history implies, and both the power and the guilt are expressed and symbolised by the use of the English language. But the strength of his situation depends on the contention that his particular angle is not unique to himself, or even the wider community of expatriates, but reflects the angle at which post-independence Indian politics and politicians themselves related to the Indian reality.

Rushdie made Saleem in his own fallible image. He admits, in 'Imaginary Homelands,' to feeling that he had to face, in the text of *Midnight's Children*, the multiple problems of not only a fallible, but a self-consciously partial, nostalgic and a guilty memory, politically placed at a peculiar angle to his homeland as a result of his privileged migration. Thus the image of Saleem emerges, first and foremost as a suspect narrator, 'his mistakes are the mistakes of fallible memory compounded by quirks of character and of circumstance, and his vision is fragmentary' (p.10). But it is significant that Rushdie's fictional image in this case is not that of an immigrant writer specifically - as it was to

be in *Shame* - but of what Uma Parameswaran calls a 'native-alien.'⁶ Saleem's alienation is a result of his background - both as Muslim and as financially privileged - and of his education. But the language of elitist exclusiveness he speaks is a 'pure' upper class Urdu, not English. Saleem is a man who has never been outside the Indian subcontinent, but in his guilty marginality, Rushdie is able to create and parody an image of himself, the immigrant Indian in England writing a novel about the political history of post-independence India. In *Midnight's Children*, therefore, Rushdie seems to agree with Parameswaran's argument that the exiled writer is an offspring of the native-alien, at least that the affinity of their position is so close as to enable Rushdie to project the image of both into the one representation in Saleem.

Rushdie therefore does follow the string of expatriate writers that Parameswaran categorises as narcissistic storytellers of their own alienation in concentrating on his own alienated vantage point, but argues for the universality of it, not only to the Indian condition, but, another step further, to contemporary humanity in general.⁷ It is arguable, and has been argued convincingly, that the Indian writer using English as a medium lacks the local allegiances that define a writer who uses one of the Indian languages, tying him to a people, and a region, and thus rendering the multiple nature of modern India from a distinct vantage point. The writer in English is obliged by education as well as by language itself to identify with a wider notion of India and Indianness - ideally a unifying one that encompasses, or tries to, the various peoples and languages of India into what Rushdie called a 'collective fiction,' embodying the dream of a new-born nation to harmonise all its various threads under one flag, one nationhood. But the fact remains that representing this new nationhood through the English language is a constant

reminder that the 'collective fiction' is by no means a neutral one. That, on the contrary, it is a direct legacy of the Raj. In that sense, Salman Rushdie's model in *Midnight's Children* is an appropriate one for the Indian writer in English, as his tenuous link with India, and the simultaneous awareness of his novel's unifying ambition and the affinity of his narrative with the colonial agenda, is a model that applies to the situation of the native-alien.

The paradox of *Midnight's Children*, and the Indian novels in English it inspired, is that in their attempt to encompass Indianness they use a language that would seem to cross the many linguistic boundaries and divisions of India, and yet a language that also happens to be that of the coloniser, and hence a language that is itself redolent of illegitimate power, the product of a privileged alienation. This paradox, in *Midnight's Children*, becomes a metaphor for writing - the courage of the ambition to encompass the whole of India must, in the end, be revealed as self-defeating, for only in defeat can such writing exculpate itself from the charge of claiming an illegitimate authority. This is a novel ultimately courageous in its ambition to be all-encompassing in order to be egalitarian, and ultimately defeatist in its self-undermining tone, in order to avoid charges of literary authoritarianism that it directs against itself.

For Rushdie, writing about the history of India around independence, a period of which his personal experience is limited, the 'framing' of the story is of utmost importance. The reader of *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* alike can see the urgent need not only to ironise and undermine the writer's position by authorial intrusions and a myriad of other

trickeries that are common enough in contemporary fiction, but also a need to place, to define, and to a large extent defend the authorial stance.

Saleem, Rushdie's fictional self-image as a native-alien, or the immigrant writer fighting his alienation, is on a quest not only to capture Indianness in his narrative, but also in his mind, by attempting to allow the symbolic thousand-and-one teeming voices of India equal hearing space in his head, which enable him to identify himself with the diversity of Indianness. To make this democracy possible, the first problem that he needs to solve is that of communication:

The inner monologues of all the so-called teeming millions, of masses and classes alike, jostled for space within my head. In the beginning, when I was content to be an audience - before I began to *act* - there was a language problem. The voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the southern slurrings of Tamil. I understood only a fraction of the things being said within the walls of my skull (p.168).

The 'language problem' continues to haunt Saleem, even after he manages to solve the immediate obstacle in his communication with the rest of the magically gifted children born at the midnight hour when India gained its independence. Later, he claims, when he learned to probe 'below the surface transmissions... language faded away, and was replaced by universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words' (p.168). This is wishful thinking on Saleem's part. Even though he manages to perform instant mental translations and reassure his correspondents with a comforting but propaganda-like mental transmission of his image 'smiling in what I trusted was a soothing, friendly, confident and leader-like fashion' (p.219), his differences remain. The midnight's children, on whom the promise of the new democracy depended, hang on resolutely to

their localities, and ancient local prejudices. And Saleem, however much he might wish the 'midnight's children's conference' to be a 'loose federation of equals, all points of view given free expression' (p.220) cannot overcome the temptation to cast himself as their leader, an ambition made apparent by his attitude towards Shiva, his alter-ego and adversary, and towards Padma, his servant and audience, an attitude which ranges from contempt to a condescension that even his liberalism cannot mask. Among the voices in his head, his personal 'all-India radio,' his own voice remains primary. Even if he is not at all times honest with himself about the reasons for his primacy, the source of it is clearly not simply transcendental, but is socially and linguistically positioned. Two languages symbolise that elitism in this novel: the pure upper class Urdu that Saleem speaks, and the English in which the novel is written. Even when Saleem's rapport with the children of midnight is not obstructed by actual linguistics, it is still marred by the by-products of that same social difference.

The visual image that Saleem projects of himself in the room overlooking the pickle-factory is of a man bent over his desk writing under an 'anglepoise light.' This is Rushdie's metaphor for post-colonial Indo-British writing. 'Anglepoise' is an obvious pun for Englishness, broadly speaking, the colonial influence on Indian culture and the consciousness of the Indian writer. It represents the post-colonial claim that, although India might have freed itself from British rule, it remains subject to 'poised,' disinterested judgment from the perspective of British values. Saleem, and by implication Rushdie, are writing about India on an Indian desk, but there is an English pool of light above their shoulder, in an inescapable position of dominance. The image suggests that Rushdie, representing here both Parameswaran's native alien and the expatriate, placed at an angle

of alienation to his subject matter, by virtue of the Western influence which he adopts and attempts to shake off simultaneously, is obliged to conduct a paradoxical enterprise.

But the mixed influences that create Saleem's frame of mind cannot simply be explained by an opposition of Western medium and Indian subject matter. Though very aware of the imperial legacy ingrained in his position both of social privilege and of English-medium writer, it is the multitude of intertwined histories and the hotchpotch of influences on him that cause Saleem's frenzied fear of absurdity, his desperate need for purpose, and for meaning. In her essay 'Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie's Art,' Uma Parameswaran drives home the point about Saleem's genealogy:

Saleem is the son of an Englishman and a Hindu street-singer's wife; he is brought up by a Kashmiri Muslim couple whose own child is given to the street-singer by Mary Pereira, a Goanese midwife influenced by her Marxist lover into doing her mite towards the equalization of classes; Mary Pereira, with her Catholicism and paranoia, becomes Saleem's *ayah*. The symbolism for religious friction, mixed ancestries, loss of identity, is very clear and very loud. So loud that one hesitates even to mention that we have in Saleem the writer, with his English father, Indian mother, Mission-schooling and catholic ayah, an analogue of Indo-English writing.⁸

By making Saleem's background as chaotic as possible, Rushdie is testing out his oft-repeated understanding of Indian culture as the classic instance of hybridity, of strands so various and mixed already that a notion of 'pure' Indianness is absurd. In Rushdie's fiction, Indians are a people so varied in genealogy and culture that it would not stretch the definitions of what it means to be a 'good Indian' - a notion which Rushdie grapples with in *The Satanic Verses* - if it were to allow Indian writers in English, and in England, under the heading.⁹ Thus Saleem explains over and over again to Padma that in order to understand him, one has to understand the infinite variety that is the essential

characteristic of Indianness. And Rushdie argues in essay after essay that the essence of Indianness has never been purity, but 'multiplicity and plurality and mingling,' that 'there can be no one way - religious, cultural or linguistic - of being an Indian.'¹⁰

But Parameswaran has a point in relating Saleem's genealogy to his writing, as the family chronicle that Saleem tries the patience of Padma with is not just parodying Indian history, but also charts literary ancestry. Saleem is infected with what he claims is an 'Indian disease,' a never-ending 'urge to encapsulate the whole of reality.' Saleem's own reason for it is his fervour for democracy in his own head: aware of his tendency towards solipsism, of the potential 'purity' of his background and his voice, Saleem tries to allow as many voices as possible into his head, and as many stories as possible into his tale. His urge to encapsulate the whole of Indian reality in his one mind is a result of his outsider's wish for identification, for feeling truly Indian. But he also sees various Indian analogies to his disease, both ancient and modern. In other words, he sees a whole tradition behind his urge, notably Hindu temples, on which the sculptor places as much as possible, cramming the universe into the limits of religious and artistic expression. Outside Saleem's parents' Delhi home, Lifafa Das the peep-show man stuffs more and more cards into his box, in an effort to deliver his promise of 'see the whole world, come see everything!' (p.75). And there is the painter friend of Saleem's mother's first husband, who wanted to become a miniaturist, but his 'paintings had grown larger and larger as he tried to get the whole of life into his art' (p.48). Saleem, too, tries to get the whole of life into his art, and the whole of the Indian reality into himself. Introducing himself in the opening page of the novel, he gives the following synopsis:

I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well. Consumed multitudes are jostling and shoving inside me; and guided only by the memory of a large white bedsheet with a roughly circular hole some seven inches in diameter cut into the centre, clutching at the dream of that holey, mutilated square of linen, which is my talisman, my open-sesame, I must commence the business of remaking my life from the point at which it really began, some thirty-two years before anything as obvious, as *present*, as my clock-ridden, crime-stained birth (pp.9-10).

Here Saleem reveals both the nature of his Indian disease, and the failure of it. For even though *Midnight's Children* 'teems' with images of 'multitudes' and the 'elephantiasis' of vision that afflicts the Indian writer, there is another leitmotif that is just as significant: the bedsheet with the circular hole cut into the centre, an image of limited vision that haunts Saleem as much as his fantasy of an all-encompassing mind. Saleem's grandfather falls in love with his future wife on the basis of glimpsing parts of her body through the circular hole; years later, their daughter falls 'under the spell of the perforated sheet of her own parents' and resolves 'to fall in love with her husband bit by bit' (p.68). Saleem himself seems to catch glimpses of India through cracks - hiding inside a washing basket, or the boot of a car - when he is not encompassing India in his mind and body. The fact that the singleness of his vision and the complex multiplicity of the reality around him refuse to be moulded into a coherent whole, is a paradox that perpetually defeats Saleem in his quest for Indianness.

'A writer who understands the artificial nature of reality is more or less obliged to enter into the process of making it' (p.xiv), says Rushdie in his introduction to Günter Grass's *Writing and Politics*, and goes on to point out, in the same article, that migrants are instructed, by experience, as to the nature of reality as an 'artifact,' which can be made and unmade. *Midnight's Children* is about this process of making and unmaking reality,

and the dangers involved in the processes both for Saleem inside the text, and Rushdie outside it, whatever the purpose of their venture. He might have added that a writer who understands that his writing is 'making and unmaking' reality, is also obliged to foresee the consequences of it, and to write his defence into his text.

Thus the fact that Saleem commences 'the business of remaking [his] life' from the moment of his grandfather Aadam Aziz's return from Heidelberg to his native Kashmir is not just 'a crazy way of telling [his] life story' (p.38) as Padma suggests. It is, in fact, more in line with Uma Parameswaran's argument: it is not a coincidence that Saleem the 'native-alien' and Rushdie the immigrant Indian writer, trace their intellectual and literary ancestry to a man whose resemblance to Forster's Indian protagonist in *A Passage to India* is more than slight.

Saleem's account of pre-independence India through his family chronicle has a mythical quality, it reads with the neatness of a near-allegorical fable. Despite the magical air, it is familiar material, and this is no coincidence either: Rushdie makes inventive use of literary material that would strike an immediate chord with any academic reader, in a way that would reveal the skeleton of literary influences that form the background of the Indian writer in English. In interviews and essays after the publication of *Midnight's Children*, Rushdie voiced his distress at the way his novel was discussed:

When the book is discussed in the West, it seems to get discussed almost entirely in terms of a certain string of [non-Indian] writers... Eastern literary ancestors and the sense in which it derives out of an Indian tradition... to my mind, is much more important in it... [It uses] techniques derived from oral narrative... the most important literary form in India.¹¹

Rushdie emphasises the importance of 'Eastern' material in his novel, drawing parallels between the narrative styles of the great storytellers of India and the form of *Midnight's Children*: both are non-linear, both digress into sub-plots and leave untidy edges. But even as Rushdie states that the 'idea of literature as performance... is absolutely central to Indian culture' (p.7), one can sense the shadow of a Western education behind the observation, regardless of whether the point is accurate in itself. This is the way *Midnight's Children* reads. Despite the assertion of the centrality of Indian material, one has to digest the fact that it is exactly such material (names from Indian epics, Urdu colloquialisms, recent Indian history and politics) that gets explained and annotated in various ways, and the 'Western' material is put across with the assumption that it will be understood.

The irony of the first, Kashmiri chapter, which can be read as a collage of references to representations of India in the literary imagination, rests on the portrayal of Aadam Aziz, the patriarch from whom Saleem traces his lineage, much to Padma's annoyance, as he turns out not to be his real grandfather. In a book full of busy name symbolisms, Aadam Aziz is no exception: Aadam (or Aadam Baba as Tai the boatman calls him) emphasises his role as the first man, the archetype, the patriarch, the beginning. It is a Muslim name, and he finds himself thrown into the middle of a conflict between sectarianism and secularism in politics that would shape the future of the new India to which he is committed. His surname, on the other hand, is a clear reference to the Dr Aziz in Forster's novel, the Western educated doctor, who is so willing to bridge the gap, to become a 'modern Indian.' As Timothy Brennan points out in *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation*, the element of irony is obvious: Dr Aziz is a Western

creation, the archetypal 'progressive Indian' from a Western point of view.¹² Furthermore, Rushdie fleshes out for us the background of this by now most familiar literary Indian 'type.'

Aadam Aziz returns to Kashmir in 1915, having finished his medical studies in Heidelberg, aiming to settle back into the Kashmir of his childhood, to return 'home,' but finds that he has 'altered vision.'

Now, returning, he saw through travelled eyes. Instead of the beauty of the tiny valley... he noticed the narrowness, the proximity of the horizon; and felt sad, to be at home and feel so utterly enclosed. He also felt - inexplicably - as though the old place resented his educated, stethoscoped return.... Many years later... he would try and recall his childhood springs in Paradise, the way it was before travel and tussocks and army tanks messed everything up (p.11).

The 'tussock' refers to the incident, the 'catalyst,' that results in Aadam Aziz's loss of faith: attempting to pray one morning, he hits his head on a tussock, and traumatically decides 'never again to kiss earth for any god or man.' This, Rushdie tells us, leaves a 'god-shaped hole' in his heart. Thus the 'travelled' Aadam Aziz returns from his five years in Germany, and finds himself trapped in a 'middle place.' His Western education has made him 'less Indian,' a half-and-halfer' (p.18), both in the eyes of Tai, the semi-mythical fisherman, the father-figure of his childhood, and also his own. Neither his guilt, nor the hostility he finds in his return are imaginary, and they leave him vulnerable. He agonises over the god-shaped hole in his heart created by his loss of faith, which had given him definition before he left his homeland 'paradise,' and he tries to fill the hole with an Indian woman he falls in love with, 'bit by bit.' But he is incompatible with her

as a whole, and his political optimism, the idea of a new, secular India, ultimately fails him.

Aziz comes back from Heidelberg with progressive ideas, and with a love of education and modernity, but to his chagrin, the adaptation of these ideas to his life in India compromises his religion, and his Indianness. The political systems and ideologies that fuel his optimism are not neutral. Neither had his stay in the West been without its conflicts:

Heidelberg, in which, along with medicine and politics, he learned that India - like radium - had been 'discovered' by the Europeans; even Oskar was filled with admiration for Vasco da Gama, and this was what finally separated Aadam Aziz from his friends, this belief of theirs that he was somehow a creation of their ancestors... so here he was, despite their presence in his head, attempting to re-unite himself with an earlier self which ignored their influence but knew everything it ought to have known... But it was no good, he was caught in a strange middle ground, trapped between belief and disbelief (pp.11-12).

So although he is largely Westernised, Dr Aziz is aware of 'Orientalist' attitudes - it is arguable, in fact, that the two go together. Aadam Aziz's dilemma stems from the power relationship between his home and his education. Like his namesake in *A Passage to India*, who feels unable to be friends with an Englishman within the present political situation, Aadam Aziz cannot avoid the taint of politics on his Western education and be at peace with the new educated direction of his vision. What Saleem calls the 'real beginning' of his story is this antagonistic dichotomy of Eastern-Western, Colonised-coloniser, traditional-modern, religious-secular cultures. A dichotomy of which the Indian intellectual, the one who conceptualises the new India, becomes aware after an educational foray into the West.

The notions of 'Indianness' become even more blurred by the time Saleem is born and the new nation-state of India is launched. Whereas Aadam Aziz's vision had 'altered' radically after an actual passage to the West, one generation later, the drama is enacted in its entirety on native soil. Aadam Aziz had found himself torn by an East-West dichotomy in the clearest sense, being a product of the colonial period, which imbues his residence in the West, and his 'altered vision' with a political immediacy. During the takeover of power from the British, it is India that alters its vision of itself, and regards itself 'through travelled eyes.'

What we witness in the shift from Aadam Aziz to Ahmed Sinai to Saleem is a gradual internalisation of the quest for Indian self-definition, along with the shifting nuances of the relation between East and West in the Indian context. In the first generation, which in Saleem's estimation is the 'real beginning,' the struggle largely has external bearings. With nationalism quite clearly defined as an opposition against the existing British rule, a useful focus is provided to define Indianness, as the colonised victim against the colonising power. But the ambiguity that already complicates Aadam Aziz's relation to the coloniser and colonised cultures becomes clearer when, with the removal of the Raj, these attitudes are internalised by the native upper classes. Having only the Western imperialist system as the expression of sovereignty and civilisation, Indian autonomy models itself upon it, and the new Indian elite become 'mimic-men.' These are the 'native-aliens' in Rushdie's fiction.

The background that Saleem is to grow up in is prepared by Rushdie in a jokey take-over of the houses in an exclusive Bombay location from their previous, English owner,

synchronised with the changeover of power from Mountbatten to the Congress. Two months before the Midnight of Saleem's and the new India's birth, William Methwold, aristocratic owner of the houses on Methwold's estate, asks Saleem's father to 'permit a departing colonial his little game.' The new owners get a 'fantastic price,' if they agree to take over everything in the houses 'lock, stock and barrel' (p.95), until the title deeds are transferred, 'at the same time as the Raj' (p.96) ends. Accordingly, the new inhabitants of the estate, hand-picked by Methwold to form a micro-society to mimic the Englishman's ideal of the new India, start enacting the transfer of power. Ahmed Sinai's voice changes, 'in the presence of the Englishman it [becomes] a hideous mockery of an Oxford drawl' they learn how to use the equipment in the houses that they took over 'fully-Western-furnished,' and the six o'clock cocktail hour on the lawn becomes a habit, its origin forgotten (p.96).

Saleem's father gives in to this imposed change enthusiastically. Later, when he develops a skin disease that turns his skin white, his son offers his readers two explanations: either it served the purpose of giving Saleem a 'snow-white father to set beside [his] ebony mother,' to enhance symbolically his mixed inheritance, or it is a widespread 'Indian' problem, affecting several businessman in the newly-independent country as well as

Ahmed Sinai:

All over India, I stumbled across good Indian businessmen, their fortunes thriving thanks to the first Five Year Plan, which had concentrated on building commerce... businessmen who had become or were becoming very, very pale indeed! It seems the gargantuan (even heroic) efforts involved in taking over from the British and becoming masters of their own destinies had drained the colour from their cheeks... in which case, perhaps my father was a late victim of the widespread, though generally unremarked phenomenon. The businessmen of India were turning white (p.179).

The implication is that it is not only the businessmen who are symbolically turning white. India itself comes to reflect the colour mix of Saleem's family, India itself reenacts patterns of sovereignty and servility previously inflicted on it by a foreign power and starts seeing itself through English eyes in a culmination of Aadam Aziz's 'altered vision.' Rushdie works hard to avoid the charge of 'turning white' himself, a charge to which he is as vulnerable to as Saleem, both privileged children of an India where the privileged classes are mimic-men.

Midnight's Children can be interpreted as portraying the end of the Raj as the departure of the master narrative that explained India, justifying its discourse of imperialism by the exercise of actual power, according to the model of Orientalism. What takes its place are the teeming voices and the 'Indian talent for non-stop regeneration' that Rushdie insists his novel celebrates. Rushdie has no option but to echo these 'teeming' voices, several of which are attempting to define the new India. From the Muslim League to the Congress Party, from Saleem to Shiva to Indira Gandhi, the fiendish black widow of Saleem's nightmares, the clashing definitions of Indianness in the novel are power struggles which Rushdie cannot bring to a conclusion without coming too close to a literary imperialism of which Saleem is sometimes guilty in the text.

Midnight's Children is told by a man who is unable to place himself in Indian society. Saleem is unable to gauge, variously, his importance or his insignificance in the events that surround his life. In his quest to make sense of India, and of his own identity in relation to it, he claims to be, variously, 'mirroring' history or being 'handcuffed' to it, to make things happen, or be 'the sort of person *to whom things have been done*' (p.237,

Rushdie's italics). Saleem's welcome into the world is one of ecstatic anticipation, all the hope and optimism of his parents focusing on his imminent arrival. Arriving into the world at the moment of India's arrival into independence, baby Saleem is from birth instilled with a sense of his own importance, even centrality. He has proof in a letter from Nehru himself, anticipating the hyperbole in which Saleem grows to see his relationship with his country, telling him 'you are the newest bearer of that ancient face of India which is also eternally young. We shall be watching over your life with the closest attention; it will be, in a sense, the mirror of our own' (p.122). His ayah sends him to sleep with the nightly lullaby, 'anything you want to be, you can be: you can be just what-all you want' (p.127). All this convinces little Saleem of his crucial importance to his birth-land: 'life in Bombay was as teeming, as manifold, as multitudinously shapeless as ever... except that I had arrived' (p.126). As he announces to Padma, reminiscing from the pickle factory about the early days of his promise: 'I was already beginning to take my place at the centre of the universe; and by the time I had finished, I would give meaning to it all' (p.126-7). But his illusion of power does not last. Quite quickly, he realises the danger of his megalomania, and that he is not alone in the predicament:

Was my lifelong belief in the equation between the State and myself transmuted, in 'the Madam's' mind, into that in-those-days-famous phrase: *India is Indira and Indira is India*? Were we competitors for centrality - was she gripped by a lust for meaning as profound as my own - and was that, was that why...? (p.420).

His 'magical' gift puts Saleem in a position not only of universal might but also of universal guilt. His claim to centrality shifts alarmingly from an illusion of omnipotence to one of neurotic responsibility. His self-image alters from master of his fate, and 'controller of flooding multitudes' to that of the perennial victim, whose only meaning

is in his annihilation by multitudes. 'I had entered the illusion of the artist,' Saleem explains to Padma, 'and thought of the multitudinous realities of the land as the raw unshaped material of my gift' (p.174). Any activity of authorship involves an aspiration to centrality and authority - but such an aspiration is one ridden with guilt for both Saleem and Rushdie himself. Just as Saleem realises the danger involved in his attempt to explain India, by recognising its closeness to the political tyranny that he opposes, Rushdie is aware of his own precarious guiltiness in writing the modern epic of India, and assuming the power to give meaning to the 'raw unshaped material' of India. Saleem's magical gift is a textual projection of Rushdie's guilty play with his own authorial power and powerlessness.

Midnight's Children has the model of a certain type of reader ingrained in its text: Padma, the 'ignorant and superstitious' servant-cum-concubine on whom Saleem tries out his story, and sounds out his theories of writing too. But this is a relationship that is full of frustrations for both parties: Saleem is frustrated with Padma's crudity, her lack of appreciation for what his writing is trying to achieve; and Padma is frustrated with Saleem's roundabout, non-linear storytelling, as well as his impotence. The relationship reminds us of Saleem's conflict with Shiva over the management of the Midnight's Children's conference. Shiva has no patience with Saleem's progressive liberalism, his ideal of a 'loose federation of equals, all points of view given free expression.' Shiva's model is simpler: 'everybody does what I say or I squeeze the shit outa them with my knees.' He dismisses Saleem's liberalism as the fantasies of a 'rich boy' (p.220). Even though he constantly contrasts his own idealism with Shiva's despotism, this is an argument that Saleem cannot refute: though he speaks for egalitarianism, his status as

the 'rich kid' on his hillock-top cocoon puts him in a position of superiority even when he preaches otherwise. And in his dislike for Shiva, there is more than a slight trace of social condescension: 'To be honest,' he admits, 'I didn't like Shiva. I disliked the roughness of his tongue, the crudity of his ideas' (p.226).

A comparable undercurrent of social and intellectual condescension runs through Saleem's relationship with Padma. For Saleem, Padma represents the conservative urge in both writer and reader, the wish for realism, for sequence and moral conclusion, for a unifying literal meaning. Ultimately, what Padma wants is Saleem's 'potency,' literally as well as metaphorically. But such writerly 'power' and moral authority is just what Rushdie cannot afford to give his narrator. Saleem is not altogether immune to Padma's charms: the pull of her admiration, her curiosity for what-happens-next, urges him forward, and at times it is a struggle not to allow himself to be seduced by the 'proper pride of the successful storyteller' (p.38) giving into the lure of power and sequence. In a way, by refusing Padma's requests, Rushdie is attempting to appease his subcontinental readers by showing his unwillingness to claim authority over his Indian material, that he had renounced by leaving behind his native country.

The Saleem-Padma model's effectiveness presupposes the existence of readers very unlike the Padma model. Saleem sees Padma's 'ignorance and superstition' as 'necessary counterweights to [his] miracle-laden omniscience.' In his scheme of things, Saleem is the 'wild-god of memory' whose exuberance had to be pulled down to earth by the pragmatism of the 'lotus-goddess of the present' (p.150). But the reality of Rushdie's readership, and the problems that he faces with them follow different lines, not least

because, unlike Saleem, Rushdie does not face a unified readership. Neither his subcontinental, nor Western readership are likely to approach his writing with a vacuous, Padma-like ignorance, and Rushdie's writing registers his awareness of the need to engage with the baggage of stock reactions from various angles that will be brought to the readings of his work. This is the writer's main difference from his fictional creation - where Saleem feels the urge to resist the wishes of his audience who force him to write differently and more authoritatively, Rushdie is defending himself from potential audience attacks on the fact that he is writing the novel at all.

Midnight's Children takes a classic theme of the Indian novel in English, of the alienation of the colonial educated native, the imposed estrangement and rootlessness, and a classic Forsterian one, of the inability of the mind, English or Indian, to understand, encompass, represent India, and moulds the two to make a contemporary theme of its own. Where Forster retreats into Fielding's, and his novel's, Englishness and concedes his English defeat in comprehending, much less imagining a governable whole of India, Rushdie resorts to magic realism to represent what is unrepresentable. His fictional vision of India is a politically defeatist one, even if it does give birth to 'teeming multitudes' in literary terms. And a plethora of novels certainly did follow the model created by *Midnight's Children*, so much so that, as seen in the *Bookseller* article, this is now incontrovertible fact. *Midnight's Children* manages to define literary Indianness anew, and mostly from the point of view of minorities, and aligns to it a migrant Indian identity.

The Descendants: Minorities and Cosmopolitans

The most Rushdiesque of all contemporary Indian novels is probably Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*, following closely the fictional patterns that Rushdie set out in *Midnight's Children*: this book too, is an account of post-independence Indian politics, echoing not only the Indian epics from which it derives its title, but Rushdie's novel too.¹³ It is shaped as the narrative of a storyteller, modelled as much after Saleem and Padma in *Midnight's Children* as it is on Vyasa and Ganesha in the *Mahabharata*. Its central character, Ved Vyas, a veteran Indian politician, now retired, tells the story of his political life to a sceptical scribe, in which he reveals that he is the 'offspring of a fisherwoman seduced by a travelling sage,' 'a bastard, but a bastard in a fine tradition' (p.19) and that he had fathered, in turn, the brothers who were to form the dynasty who would govern post-independence India. Thus, like the *Mahabharata*, and like *Midnight's Children*, *The Great Indian Novel* follows the fortunes of a family, who claim to shape and whose fortunes echo modern India; it makes heavy yet ironic use of a mixture of Indian mythology and magical elements to shape its narrative.

The driving force of confidence behind *The Great Indian Novel* is Salman Rushdie, and the ground he broke with his novel. There is no question in Tharoor's narrative of shying away from the question of the use of the English medium. In line with the unapologetic tone of his writing, Tharoor lunges into the issue head on, and in the course of the narrative, attracts our attention to various Indian politicians, and their landmark speeches, and the fact and the irony that they used English, to declare the independence of the new state from the English colonial power. Tharoor's use of the English language

in his 'great Indian novel' therefore echoes the irony of modern Indian politics and contemporary Indianness, rather than expressing nervousness about enslaving the novel to Western literary modes or subordinating it to the departed colonial power. Tharoor's novel does not only parody marginality in following the fortunes of a single family, as did Rushdie, and after him, a spate of other writers who hail from India's smaller ethnic groups, but in its use of an upper class Brahminical family, allegorising both the characters of the ancient Indian epics and of modern Indian politics at the same time, it becomes a parody of the mainstream, and mainstream Indian politics, a Hindu version of Rushdie's Muslim-immigrant tale.

The Great Indian Novel owes explicit allegiance to various literary sources: the Indian epic that inspired its name, *Midnight's Children* that inspired its form, and the string of English novels on India which, distorted, provide the jokey chapter titles: 'The Duel with the Crown,' 'A Raj Quartet,' 'Him - Or, the Far Power-Villain,' 'The Man who Could not Be King,' 'Passages Through India,' 'The Bungle Book,' and so on. This is a novel with Indian points of reference, ancient and contemporary, Indo-British or Anglo-Indian, and comfortable with the English medium. If a contemporary Indian writer writing in English in the past was in some way establishing connections and allegiances with the West, it is arguable that now those references have shifted, and a novel of the sort that Shashi Tharoor's is, owes its literary allegiance to *Midnight's Children* as its model of novel writing in English, if not exactly a 'native' model, not quite a foreign one either, and certainly not a case of literary Uncle Tomism. *The Great Indian Novel*, in a sense, is the mainstream articulation of *Midnight's Children*, and as such locates its burden of guilt elsewhere from the earlier novel, which was doubly anguished by the Muslimness of

Saleem, and the immigration of its author, not quite mentioned in the novel, but colouring its approach nevertheless. The elitism of *The Great Indian Novel* is that of the class of Indians who have always dominated mainstream Indian politics.

Amitav Ghosh's novels in English, on the other hand, are nevertheless specifically Bengali ones, and follow the instincts of *Midnight's Children* in studying the contemporary Indian condition through the chronicle of one of its sub-groups. It is in good company, along with comparable Rushdiesque novels, such as Allan Sealy's *The Trotter-Nama* and Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants*.¹⁴ Ghosh's Bengali consciousness is not necessarily the offspring of the great cultural and literary influence that Calcutta has had on the Indian panorama. His Calcutta, and his family, in fact and in fiction, are populated with Bengalis who hail from various corners of the map, but the first displacement, the fact that his family had to move from Dhaka to Calcutta after the partition of India, is the one that constitutes the basic trauma of his fiction. But it doesn't end there -Ghosh himself went to Oxford University, and then to Egypt to do fieldwork on his anthropology thesis, before returning to Calcutta. His fiction is full of Indians of the 'diaspora:' peasants who have to move around India and the middle East in search of work; Indian students who go to England and compare it with the England of their imagination; highbrow Indian diplomats who take their family around the world until they feel the only constant in their lives is the airport transit lounges; and the formations of border refugee towns in Bengal, which constitute the origin of all the ensuing mass movement. Ghosh writes consistently of border towns, crises and displacements: Lalpukur, Calcutta, Dhaka, London during the war, Egypt before and during the Gulf war.

Ghosh arrives at a notion of the blurring of definitions, boundaries and frontiers, of the mixing of languages, histories and nationalities, of 'shadow lines,' after exploring notions of travel and displacement within the post-partition Bengali context. His first novel, *The Circle of Reason*, is the one that most closely echoes Rushdie's novel, in its use of a young Bengali boy with extraordinary powers, to represent Indianness.¹⁵ Alu, an orphan, at the age of seven goes to stay with his uncle in the village of Lalpukur. The inhabitants of Lalpukur have been displaced from their homeland in Bangladesh, and still speak with a quaint Bengali dialect that the neighbouring villages in the new district cannot understand. Their dialect is looked down on as coarse and strange by the neighbours, but is a source of clannish secretive pride for the inhabitants of Lalpukur. Alu's uncle Balam, the university educated schoolteacher of the village, and an amateur phrenologist in search of a practical application of his science, comes to represent the Indian intellectual who is trying to put to use his love and reverence of Western information and science and apply it to local situations. Balam's obsession with disinfectant, for use on the latest wave refugees from Bangladesh proves, through a convoluted plot, to be his downfall. But it is Alu, the true hybrid, who assimilates his urban background, his uncle's instruction of pure science and the peasantly occupation of weaving, which is his art and his medium of political expression at the same time, and who travels to Egypt as a labourer and finds a reflection of his Bengali border town in the Egyptian port of al-Ghazira, home to illegal labourers from round the world, that becomes the Rushdiesque representation of the Indian of the future in the novel. Alu is blessed with the talent of 'multiple-assimilation,' and is still hopeful at the end of his Egyptian sojourn, with his half-Arabic son, called Boss, in his arms. 'Prepared to step

into a new world' despite the 'continents of defeat standing in their way,' the novel ends, declaring that 'hope is the beginning' (p.423).

Ghosh's second novel, *The Shadow Lines* once again deals with the condition of being on the borders between spaces without feeling part of either, and the consequent feeling of the indistinguishableness of spaces and the disappearance of locality and indigenusness.¹⁶ The running joke in the Calcuttan family in the novel is that the grandmother, who grew up in Dhaka but spent most of her adult life in post-partition India, does not know the difference between 'coming' and 'going.' The origin of the joke is the fact that although the grandmother physically moved from Dhaka to Calcutta, her mental processes never quite caught up with, and adapted to, the change of location. When her sister's husband is appointed to a diplomatic position in the Indian embassy in Dhaka, the grandmother talks of them 'coming' to Dhaka. And later on, when she decides to go to Dhaka to rescue her dying uncle, she talks of taking him 'home' to India, a country to which the old man had never been. She, living testimony to the history of the 'inventedness' of the country they need to regard as home, in effect, starts the tradition of the confusion of locality and the notion of 'home' within her extended, travelling family.

The novel explores different notions of travel and cosmopolitanism through the contrast of the narrator, raised in a Calcutta suburb, and the cousin he idolises, Ila, the daughter of a diplomat. The narrator spends his childhood in Calcutta filled with dreams of travel, of place names turned into 'magic talismans' pointed out to him by his eccentric uncle Tridib in 'his tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas:' 'Tridib had given me worlds to travel in

and he had given me eyes to see them with' (p.26). As for his cousin Ila, these same places 'had for her a familiarity no less dull than the lake [in the Calcutta neighbourhood] had for me' (p.26). The narrator travels the world in his imagination - though he insists, not a 'fairyland' one, but one 'used with precision.' His 'imagined' London, where Tridib lived during the war is populated with intricate detail and people in complicated, resonant relationships. Ila on the other hand, 'moves the inventions she lives in with her, so that though she lived in many places, she had never travelled at all' (p.27). Though Ila's cosmopolitanism and sophistication is a source of much envy among the relatives in India, an image which she perpetrates and exploits, her homelessness is a source of trauma that she is not prepared to admit.

For Ila, the cosmopolitan love object of the narrator, the travels that characterised her childhood following her diplomat father round the world are remembered not by the landmarks that the narrator can recite by heart. Her memory of Cairo is not made distinct by 'the pointed arch in the mosque of Ibn Tulun' or the 'Great Pyramid of Cheops,' but by the fact that 'the ladies toilet is way on the other side of the departure lounge' (p.26). What the young boy yearns for - the cosmopolitan sophistication of the world-traveller, is for Ila transformed to aimless and painful drifting from one anonymous space to another, where, the adult narrator imagines her 'alighting on these daydream names - Addis Ababa, Algiers, Brisbane - and running around the airport to look for the Ladies, not because she wanted to go, but because those were the only fixed points in the shifting landscapes of her childhood' (p.26).

Ila's mementos of her cosmopolitan existence are the yearbooks from the international schools she attends in each country - her sources of pride, almost trophy-like, signal towards a kind of anonymity. They are also sources of fantasy, by which she cultivates the cosmopolitan image of herself. Ila describes herself in these schools as a popular, successful participant, but the group photos belie her fantasy: she is always a shadow behind other people, on the edges of photos, ill at ease, and brown. And this she remains till the end of the novel, in her attachment to a Trotskyite commune in London, where she is regarded an exotic accessory, affectionately patronised as 'our own upper-class Asian Marxist' (p.101), and in her infatuation with and marriage to an Englishman whose rejection of her as a child had threatened to destroy her fantasy life in which she had imagined her self as 'Magda,' the beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed, pink-cheeked girl, envied for her beauty and sophisticated difference.

Ghosh creates a structure in *The Shadow Lines* in which the Indian of locality, of the Calcutta suburbs in this case, is the one who is aware of the 'inventedness' of India, and places in general, of the process of active and 'precise' use of the imagination needed to create notions of home and nationhood, and it is the Indian of cosmopolitan glamour, produced by the anonymity of International schools, who cannot accept any reality other than the present, and cannot feel part any locality or local politics, in a way that is shown to be a failure of the imagination:

I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination, that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more nor less true, only very far apart. It was not her fault that she could not understand... The inventions she had lived in moved with her, so that although she lived in many places, she had never travelled at all (p.27).

Ghosh's position in Lataifa and Nashawy, the two villages where he does fieldwork, is doubly significant: not only is he there as a researcher, but his base is at Oxford University, where he is aiming to obtain a PhD in a subject as suggestive as Anthropology. He presents his own research area, the Ben Ezra Synagogue in Cairo, all the documents in which were taken out of the country to various universities and museums in the West, by a number of individuals, some travellers, some amateur, some professional anthropologists. Ghosh's own research, while attempting to revise this long line of exploitation and ransacking, and emphasising the 'sense of entitlement' (p.19) that the Synagogue's 12th century connection with India gives him, ironically simultaneously continues the tradition that he criticises. Though making a conscious attempt at revision, he is repeatedly reminded not only of the ambivalence of his position as a researcher from Oxford, but of the unconscious bias in his point of view and opinions as well.

Ghosh arrives in Lataifa and Nashawy expecting to encounter 'on that most ancient and most settled of soils a settled and restful people,' the unspoken but hinted assumption of a 'local' 'native' culture in contrast with his cosmopolitan restlessness, which smacks, albeit unwittingly, of the pose of the Western explorer who brings his worldly gaze to rest on the limited sphere of a local culture. Throughout his stay, the two villages and their inhabitants manage continually to startle Ghosh out of preconceptions that he did not realise he had. The first is his easy contrast between the settled locality of these agricultural communities and his own urban cosmopolitanism, as the image of the airline transit lounge returns:

The area around Nashawy had never been a rooted kind of place; at times it seemed to be possessed by all the busy restlessness of an airport's transit lounge. Indeed, a long history of travel was recorded in the very names of the area's 'families'... The legacy of transience had not ended

with their ancestors either: in Zaghloul's own generation dozens of men had been 'outside', working on the shaikhdoms of the Gulf, or Libya, while many others had been to Saudi Arabia on the Hajj, or to the Yemen, as soldiers - some men had passports so thick they opened like ink-blackened concertinas (pp.173-4).

Expanding the idea in a piece he wrote for *Granta*, Ghosh adds:

And none of this was new: their grandparents and ancestors and relatives had travelled and migrated too, in much the same way as mine had, in the Indian subcontinent - because of wars, or for money and jobs, or perhaps simply because they got tired of living always in one place... The wanderlust of its founders had been ploughed into the soil of the village: it seemed to me sometimes that every man in it was a traveller.¹⁸

This image of the native village as a transit lounge in *In An Antique Land* does not seem to be the same figure of rootless desolation that it was for Ila in *The Shadow Lines*, but a comforting one for Ghosh, the cosmopolitan migrant-traveller, who is finding solace in discovering prototypes of himself in diverse locations - and not only modern ones of migrant labour and displacement, but an ancient tradition of migration, suggesting the normality and rootedness in tradition of his own experience. But the comfort of this affinity is disrupted by the realisation that this 'travelling' is not the neutral one that he at first assumed it to be, and nor is the nature of his crossing and recrossing of boundaries from India to England to Egypt, and then through research back to India.

Ghosh's ambivalent position in Lataifa and Nashawy is exacerbated by the fact that he is unable to sustain anything remotely like the classic pose of the anthropologist, as an invisible, aloof, yet superior witness. He finds himself under increasing pressure from the constant scrutiny of the villagers who seem as interested in finding out about him, questioning him, as he is of them - and who seem to view their interest as legitimised by the fact that he is researching *them*, and asking them questions. Aware of this, Ghosh is

increasingly on edge and defensive and he finds himself, his family, nationality and most often, Hinduism, under scrutiny, and is repeatedly thrust into the position of having to explain himself and defend his religion, and resisting attempts to convert him to Islam, marry him to a local, making him one of their own. His secular, modern explanations of religion (in India cows are important because they give milk) feel weak and frustrate him, and are never taken seriously by his questioners. Questions and preconceptions about Indian custom and politics similarly catch him unprepared and off balance.

He commands a certain respect from the educated and the elder but his prestige suffers an erosion with the children who interpret his foreignness and lack of familiarity with local customs and Arabic words as evidence that he is 'simple,' 'like a child,' 'doesn't know a thing, not religion, not politics, not sex... that's why he's always asking questions' (p.65). And it is mostly the children or the young, and the women, who continuously question him about his 'cow worship' and the burning of the dead, in episodes that are not always comical. After one particularly intense session of questioning on Hinduism, one of his questioners, a young boy, tries to reassure Ghosh that the questions were well-meant just like his own questions: 'They were only asking questions... just like you do; they didn't mean any harm... These are just customs; it's natural people should be curious' (p.204). But though Ghosh is intellectually aware of this, his emotional reactions, remain those of an Indian, and a Bengali in possession of 'an Indian's terror of symbols' (p.210), who remembers the violent Hindu-Muslim conflicts of his childhood, where statements of religious difference stood for violence, not natural, innocent curiosity.

His situation is not helped as he constantly makes mistakes of etiquette, resulting from his preconceived ideas about life in a Muslim Egyptian village. The village women mock

him for not acknowledging and talking to them on the street, when he had intended to be discreet and not give offence by breaking a code of what he conceives as 'traditional Muslim' behaviour:

I was so cowed by everything I had read about Arab traditions of shame and modesty that I barely glanced at [the women], for fear of giving offence. Later it was I who was shame-stricken, thinking of the astonishment and laughter I must have provoked, walking past them, eyes lowered, never uttering so much as a word of greeting (p.41).

He later makes a similar mistake in India, where his research trail leads him to study the religious practices of a local matriarchal tribe. When told to come back later in the day to find out more about types of worship, Ghosh imagines 'a night-time vigil at a lonely shrine in a deserted and wind-tossed palm-grove.' 'Is there going to be a secret exorcism?' he asks. His companion, Prof Rai, a sociologist, casts him 'a quizzical glance. 'On television.' came the laconic answer. 'In a film that's going to be broadcast this evening' (p.252). The significance of this faux pas is more than simple embarrassment: Ghosh has once again found himself slipping into the role of naive visitor and anthropologist at once, casting Prof Rai into the role of the native informant, who is to supply exotic and secret information. Doubly ironic, then, that the source of information is an academic pointing out a television program, and that the exotic country whose culture is to be deciphered is Ghosh's own, India.

When Ghosh had assumed that the villagers would be proud of their traditions, he finds some suspicious of his motives for his questions and note-taking. In one instance, he meets with dogged resistance when he tries to find out about traditional medicine from the local Imam. While Ghosh wants to talk to Imam Abdullah of his reputedly vast knowledge of traditional medicine, the Imam is almost shameful in his denunciation of

his past knowledge, and fascinated with the syringe that he keeps in a shoe box under his bed, and all that it stands for - progress, Westernisation - in the small Egyptian village. ' 'Why do you want to hear about my herbs?' he retorted,' why don't you go back to your country and find out about your own?... Forget about all that; I'm trying to forget about it myself' ' (p.192). Neither is Imam Abdullah in isolation in this predicament, the villagers predominantly see themselves through Western eyes, as backward, marginal, underdeveloped:

Shamefully anachronistic, a warp upon time; I understood that their relationship with the objects of their everyday lives was never innocent of the knowledge that there were other places, other countries which did not have mud-walled houses and cattle-drawn ploughs, so that those objects, those houses and ploughs, were insubstantial things, ghosts displaced in time, waiting to be exorcized and laid to rest (pp.200-1).

But his most spectacular, painful, and telling encounter is again with Imam Abdullah, when the two men inadvertently offend each other, Ghosh by mentioning that the Imam has only one son, and the Imam by criticising Hinduism, yet again, in ways that remind Ghosh of the Hindu-Muslim clashes of his childhood. A comment about the barbarity of burning the dead, quickly turns into a sinister, and revealing, argument in public in the village square:

'They don't burn their dead in the West. They're not an ignorant people. They're advanced, they're educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs.'

Suddenly something seemed to boil over in my head, dilemmas and arguments I could no longer contain within myself.

'We have them too!' I shouted back at him.'In my country we have all those things too; we have guns and tanks and bombs. And they're better than anything you've got in Egypt - we're a long way ahead of you.'

'I tell you, he's lying,' cried the Imam, his voice rising in fury. 'Our guns and bombs are much better than theirs. Ours are second only to the West's.'

...

The Imam and I: delegates from two superseded civilizations, vying with each other to establish a prior claim to the technology of modern violence.

At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly. We were both travelling, he and I: we were travelling in the West. The only difference was that I had actually been there, in person... I was crushed, as I walked away; it seemed to me that the Imam and I had participated in our own final defeat, in the dissolution of the centuries of dialogue that had linked us: we had demonstrated the irreversible triumph of the language that had usurped all the others in which people once discussed their differences (pp.235-6).

To this episode, Ghosh brings not only his Indianness, but his Western education as well.

And if this scene is a demonstration that the Imam and the Indian are talking to each other through the West, the unacknowledged implication must be that Ghosh, following the trail of his research to India, is studying his country through the West as well, which is perhaps a condition possible to diagnose in not only the migrant intellectual, but in those who have not been to the West 'in person' as well. Ghosh crosses the boundaries from India to the heart of the English educational establishment to study for a subject as politically suggestive as anthropology, only to recross it to enter the prime site of Orientalist enquiry, Egypt. It is again suggestive that when in Egypt, Ghosh focuses his attention on yet another crossing, over the Indian ocean following Twelfth century trade routes from Egypt, in the footsteps of a Jewish trader, and ending up in his native India: an extremely roundabout, but equally suggestive and perhaps representative way of looking at the history and anthropology of one's own background, through travelled eyes.

NOTES

1. John Lyon, 'Trade Publishers Happy at Delhi Book Fair,' *The Bookseller* (25 February 1994), p.10.
2. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982). Further references are in the text.
3. Uma Parameswaran, 'What Price Expatriation' in *Commonwealth Writer Overseas: Themes of Exile and Expatriation* (Brussels: Didier, 1976), pp.41-52. Further references are in the text.
4. Saros Cowasjee, 'The Indian Writer in Exile,' in *Commonwealth Writer Overseas*, pp.53-61 (p.54).
5. Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.9-21 (p.17). Further references are in the text.
6. Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984).
7. Memorably, Rushdie describes Günter Grass as 'approximately half a migrant' because of his ambiguous relationship to Danzig/Gdansk, and to the German language, in his introduction to *On Writing and Politics* (London: Secher & Warburg, 1985), pp.ix-xv (p.xi).
8. Uma Parameswaran, 'Handcuffed to History: Salman Rushdie's Art,' *Ariel* 14 (October 1983), pp.34-45 (pp.39-40).
9. In *The Satanic Verses* Chamcha comments: 'the earth is full of Indians... Columbus was right, maybe; the world's made up of Indies, East, West, North. Damn it, you should be proud of us, our enterprise, the way we push against frontiers. Only thing is, we're not Indian like you. You better get used to us' (New York and London: Viking/ Penguin, 1988), p.54.
10. Salman Rushdie, 'Dynasty and Democracy,' *The New Republic* (November 26 1984), p.18.
11. Salman Rushdie, 'Midnight's Children and Shame,' (lecture/interview at the University of Aarhus, 7 October 1983), *Kunapipi* VII, 1 (1985), pp.3-12 (pp.6-7). Further references are in the text.
12. Timothy Brennan, *Salman Rushdie and the Third World: Myths of the Nation* (London: Macmillan, 1989).
13. Shashi Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* (London: Viking, 1989). Further references are in the text. In the fly-sheet of his novel, Tharoor includes a quirky 'hasty note of disclaimer' to 'those readers who may feel, justifiably, that the work that follows is neither great, nor authentically Indian, nor even much of a novel. *The Great Indian Novel* takes its title not from the author's estimate of its contents but in deference to its primary source of inspiration, the ancient epic the *Mahabharata*. In Sanskrit, Maha means great

and Bharata means India.'

14. I. Allan Sealy, *The Trotter-Nama* (London: Penguin, 1988), and Boman Desai, *The Memory of Elephants* (London: Sceptre, 1990).

15. Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (London: Granta, 1994). Further references are in the text.

16. Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines* (London: Black Swan, 1989). Further references are in the text.

17. Amitav Ghosh, *In An Antique Land* (London: Granta in association with Penguin, 1992). Further references are in the text.

18. Amitav Ghosh, 'The Imam and the Indian,' *Granta: In Trouble Again, a Special Issue of Travel Writing* 20 (Winter 1986), pp.135-46 (p.140).

CHAPTER V: THE ONLY GOOD INDIAN:

MIGRATION AND HOMECOMING IN *THE SATANIC VERSES*

How is one to place *The Satanic Verses* in the history that preceded and followed it?¹ Was it a catalyst, a relatively innocent spark that started an explosion which was waiting to happen, or should it be loaded with responsibility? How intrinsic was the content and the intentionality of this text to the crisis that followed its publication? How is it, or is it possible at all, to value and evaluate this particular novel in literary isolation? Attempts, by now, have been made, in reaction to the initial relegation of the novel, with its author, to the world of journalistic reportage, where its complexity as a work of fiction was of secondary importance. For a long time, *The Satanic Verses* was discussed purely in terms of its culpability, with only a slight, duty-bound nod in the direction of its fictional status (unless, of course, the line of defence was that its very fictional status was its guarantee of innocence, the implied argument being that the novel was far too sophisticated to be 'real,' therefore offensive, and in consequence those who did take offence should be pitied and blamed for their ignorance). And any such nod usually chose the option of discussing the Indian/immigrant theme as completely separate from the Islamic one. The reasons for this are manifold, and it is a tactic not solely confined either to the champions of free speech, Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses* or to the defenders of religious pride, protection from blasphemy, minority rights, or any of the shades of opinion which position themselves in reaction to this oppositionality, in between. Those who wish to sympathise with the Muslim minority in Britain, and therefore at least partially condemn the use of Islamic material in the novel, without writing off the novel itself (and who perhaps wish to demonstrate their ability to appreciate it as fiction) make a point of mentioning the 'immigrant' scenes in London in

terms of general approval. Even the most vocal of the book's British Muslim critics, Shabbir Akhtar of the Bradford Council of Mosques, admits to a sense of 'empathy' with the novel's treatment of the trauma of immigration.² The tone of Akhtar's writing is scrupulously intellectual, almost jauntily so, at times, taking pleasure in exposing those who accuse the Muslim point of view of anti-intellectual barbarism, by his very command of philosophical and theological as well as literary jargon.

Such defensiveness, at least on the part of writers less ebullient than Akhtar, is to be expected. What is interesting is that the defenses of *The Satanic Verses*, when adopting the line of extolling its literary merit, function by ignoring the Islamic material in it, and discussing it in much the same terms as *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*: parallels between immigration and postmodernism, the virtues of pluralism, hybridity and multiculturalism. The Islamic passages, on the other hand, get discussed in terms of their legitimacy. The discomfort in joining the two approaches together under one heading cannot merely be one of self-conscious diplomacy, or even a mark of critical clumsiness, but perhaps points to a rift in the novel itself. Or perhaps, given this particular novel's history, it no longer makes sense for a reader to attempt to hold together all the novel's many threads.

Since almost immediately after its publication, discussing *The Satanic Verses* has been synonymous with discussing the guilt of its author in a political event. This was a legitimate issue of journalism, but it worked to entangle inextricably the question of reading this novel with its readers' nervousness vis a vis 'the affair.' Even for those who did not place themselves in any particular 'camp,' any attribution of value to the text brought with it a need for self-defence, following closely the need for a defence of the

book itself. The value of *The Satanic Verses* as fiction is now intrinsically connected with its level of responsibility and possible guilt in the political world that surrounds it in too literal a way. It is true that at the height of the conflict the book and the affair were becoming increasingly divorced from one another, so that it seemed no longer necessary to read the book in order to discuss the Rushdie affair. It is a truism by now that those who attacked the book most ferociously saw no need to read it, so much so that 'I don't need to wade through filth in order to recognize it' was probably the most often used British-Muslim quotation throughout. The same is true of the book's automatic defenders, who, perhaps with some reason, suggested that one didn't need to go through a large, 'unreadable' book in order to speak up for free speech. But, in consequence, the battle of the Rushdie affair was fought in abstractions and not by means of close readings of the text. However, it is not possible simply to reverse this state of affairs. It seems impossible to read *The Satanic Verses* retrospectively, as divorced from the affair. This point is usually made with regret. Though in reading and discussing this particular book, one cannot help but keep in mind the regrettable fate of its author, perhaps the notion of 'authorial responsibility,' specifically the responsibility of a postcolonial author, writing from a position of metropolitan migration, who finds himself, in Homi Bhabha's terms, acting as a 'cultural translator,' is intrinsic to a legitimate reading of this novel, rather than a regrettable imposition caused by the events that came to surround it.³

In fact, if we look through Rushdie's previous fiction for models of the narrator-narratee dynamic, and the position of the author vis à vis his subject matter, the results are revealing. It is arguable that *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are both founded on the same perplexing question:⁴ what authority does an immigrant writer have when writing about his country of origin, its people, its politics, its ideologies, religious or otherwise?

I have already argued that *Midnight's Children* is a guilt-ridden text which paradoxically makes a strength out of its sore points and tackles the issue with bravado. Small wonder, then, that its stance and the self-conscious yet ebullient tone with which it is adopted gave rise to such a proliferation of similar fictions. *Midnight's Children* inscribes authorial guilt, but is unashamed, which is reflected in the relationship of Saleem and Padma in the text. Though there is hardly a harmonious resolution to Saleem's autobiography, he nevertheless comes to admit his responsibility towards Padma, and her reading affects his writing in necessary ways.

Shame, on the other hand, though in some ways similar in its concern with the author-subject-audience chain in postcolonial writing, adopts a significantly different stance. Sara Suleri, in *The Rhetoric of English India*, in the chapter titled 'Salman Rushdie: Embodiments of Blasphemy, Censorships of Shame,' argues that *Shame* 'enacts rather than addresses the curious posture of what it means to be ashamed' in the context of postcolonial writing.⁵ Her argument works by drawing attention to the ambivalence of this novel towards the 'location of its audience' (p.174), and its replication of colonial patterns, 'its knowledge that it can also oppress' (p.178):

The more such a text as *Shame* represses and censors its own ambivalence toward the location of its audience, the more likely it will be to seclude itself in a nervous advertisement of self-conscious ideological rectitude. To write from the pale of oppression becomes necessary solace for a writing that is made jumpy by its own relation to oppressiveness: hence the neurasthenic idiom of novels like *Shame* (pp.174-5).

Thus, in order to enable himself to write, Rushdie chooses to complicate the issue of his complicity beneath layers of self-conscious textual play, that somehow give the impression of being evasive rather than essential to the narrative. It is arguable that

Shame, with its self-consciously defensive play on notions of censorship and an author's licence and right to speak, seems to abnegate the authorial responsibility that *Midnight's Children* had tried so hard to inscribe.

One of the strategies that the author/narrator of *Shame* uses that suggests such an evasion is the introduction of Omar Khayyam as the 'vacuous centre' of the novel. Even the choice of name for the character can be somewhat hard to fathom. Here is Rushdie, in *Shame*, on Omar Khayyam, the poet:

Omar Khayyam's position as a poet is curious. He was never very popular in his native Persia; and he exists in the West in a translation that is really a complete reworking of his verses, in many cases very different from the spirit (to say nothing of the content) of the original. I, too, am a translated man. I have been *borne across*. It is generally believed that something is always lost in translation; I cling to the notion - and use, in evidence, the success of Fitzgerald-Khayyam - that something can also be gained (p.29).

The notion of translation - in person and in text - is a familiar one to the reader of Rushdie. What is curious here is whether the obvious identification with the historical Omar Khayyam extends to the character named after him in this text. What would that suggest? Is Rushdie identifying with the marginality of his 'hero,' who has no significance in the story except in the most mechanical way, whose morality exists alongside that of the world of the novel's, rather than influencing it, however objectionable those morals may be? Omar Khayyam is essentially a voyeur. Is that the role of the narrator/author here? Or is Rushdie perhaps suggesting that the metaphorical 'translation' of his work, by virtue of being read by different audiences, attributes to him a power and significance that he does not necessarily have, except to the extent that he functions as an almost passive cultural translator, or transcriber?

The narrator and the main protagonist were one and the same in *Midnight's Children*. This is not the case in *Shame*. The artificiality and the peripherality of Omar Khayyam Shakil's status as the hero is stressed repeatedly, to the extent that he disappears periodically. Not so with the narrator, identified strongly with Rushdie himself, who appears in intrusive passages, ironically, with an immediately defensive tone, to question or reassert his authority, and, crucially, his responsibility towards his subject matter or his audience. In one such passage, Rushdie not only intrudes himself, he lets an imaginary potential reader intrude as well:

Outsider! Trespasser! You have no right to this subject!... I know: nobody ever arrested me. Nor are they ever likely to. Poacher! Pirate! We reject your authority. We know you, with your foreign language wrapped around you like a flag: speaking about us in your forked tongue, what can you tell but lies? (p.28, Rushdie's italics).

Rushdie offers his self-defense against the imaginary offense by claiming that 'history is not the property of participants solely' (p.28) but the defensiveness of his tone is unmistakable. However, it is the source of this accusation, rather than the nature of it that is interesting here: though part of Rushdie's creation, the accuser is no longer the self (as was the case with Saleem when he questioned the basis of Rushdie's authority) but the reader, and a specifically Pakistani reader at that. The choice of the Pakistani reader merits attention, since the conceptual and the actual readership of postcolonial writing in metropolitan languages, the ambiguity of the audience for such fiction, is one of the main criticisms directed against authors such as Rushdie. The nature of the cultural translation is surely doubly ambiguous if the postcolonial writer presents a model of the 'native' reader as potential oppressor, a censor, in a text fated eventually to be read by a metropolitan audience. Where Saleem was conscious of his complicity in oppressing Padma, the subcontinental reader is here cast in the role of the oppressor, reversing the

power relationship. Thus, the image of the censor gives Rushdie relief from the cramping shame of writing about a slice of history in which he did not participate, but towards which he nevertheless has a specific positionality. A similar, self-conscious and ironic argument is also offered to provide relief from facticity.

The narrator of *Shame* refers to his text repeatedly as a 'modern fairy tale' (p.70), 'existing... at a slight angle to reality' (p.29), and the Pakistan of the text as 'not Pakistan, or not quite' (p.29), asserting that 'I have found this off-centring to be necessary' (p.29). There is, in fact, a case for arguing that the conceptualisation of Pakistan in this book bears certain resemblances to the Jahilia of *The Satanic Verses*. In both cases, the narrative veers between facticity, the fastidious documentation of a particular history, and fantasy, an 'allegorised' modern tale. This is ironised in *Shame*:

But suppose this were a realistic novel!... How much real life material might become compulsory!... By now, if I had been writing a book of this nature, it would have done me no good to protest that I was writing universally, not only about Pakistan. The book would have been banned, dumped in the rubbish bin, burned. All that effort for nothing! Realism can break a writer's heart.

Fortunately, however, I am only telling a sort of modern fairy-tale, so that's all right; nobody need get upset, or take anything too seriously (pp.69-70).

Despite the heavy-handed irony, it is hard to see the precise point of this tongue-in-cheek insistence on the innocence of fairy-tale in a novel exploring the possibility of censorship, and also of the threat of actual punishment. This passage constructs a puzzling and seemingly contradictory position: it starts by mocking a narrow, untutored definition of realism in fiction, which would have it document 'real life material', unselected, therefore also unedited. This caricature realism would not only be impossible to practise, its inevitable unedited political indiscretions would lead to punishment -

'banned, dumped, burned.' This is seen as inevitable, almost natural in the political and intellectual climate that a novel like *Shame* would be released into, here conceived as Pakistan rather than the United Kingdom, or any other Western market. Then comes the mockery of the insensitive reading of the sort of modern fairy tale selectivity and that *Shame* adopts: nobody need take it seriously, hence no possibility of offence, no fear of punishment. Is this writer through irony asserting the seriousness of his genre, and, properly understood, its punishability, or flirtatiously floating the idea that non-realistic, non-serious fiction can cunningly avoid persecution? Where is the misreading placed, what is the desired relationship with the potentially powerful readership?

Both *Midnight's Children* and *Shame* are novels that attract attention to their 'fragmentary' and 'partial' nature. Saleem's pathological need for an all-embracing vision, and the contrasting images of restriction by peeping through holes and gaps, represented the narrative anxiety of the novel, which declared itself only 'a version and no more than one version of all the hundreds of millions of possible versions.'⁶ The author of *Shame* displays a similar anxiety:

Although I have known Pakistan for a long time, I never lived there for longer than six months at a stretch. Once I went for just two weeks. Between these sixmonthses and fortnights there have been gaps of varying duration. I have learned Pakistan in slices... I think what I'm confessing is that, however I choose to write about over-there, I am forced to reflect that world in fragments of broken mirrors... I must reconcile myself to the inevitability of the missing bits (p.69).

This is a passage deceptively couched in a terminology of innocence and neutrality, in a novel whose author is well aware of the impossibility of 'reconciling' oneself to the 'inevitability of missing bits' in this particular act of representation. The construction of narrative authority is shown in the novel to be more than simply the function of a

regrettably fragmented personal memory. Here is Rushdie, two pages later, redefining his narrative selection as a politically problematic process of editing, choosing pointed terminology, after discussing the relative benefits of fairy-tale over realism as his chosen manner:

And now I must stop saying what I am not writing about, because there is nothing so special about that; *every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship*, it prevents the telling of other tales... I must get back to my fairy-story, because things have been happening while I've been talking too much (p.71, my italics).

The emphasis here should be on the word and the idea censorship, as opposed to the unintentional and unnoticed fallibility of Saleem, whose awareness of his ambivalent relationship to power comes late in the novel, and is crippling. In *Shame*, the 'inevitability of the missing bits' is described in much more purposeful, even oppressive, terminology: 'a kind of censorship.' This is counterbalanced in the text by the threat of censorship by the conceptual Pakistani reader, or perhaps a voice of Pakistani officialdom who would have a stake in asserting his own version of official Pakistani history, echoing the tensions of the represented history in the novel itself. Suleri's argument, that this is a text on the one hand 'horrified at its own powers of replication, its knowledge that it also can oppress' (pp.177-178) and on the other, a text that displays 'filial anxieties... when [its author] seeks to deny all dignity to a history that is indirectly his' (p.183), seems convincing.

The image of mutual censorship, however, does point to a imperative in *Shame* different from that which Rushdie had in writing his novel of India. The excess that needs to be curbed is not the nostalgia of the expansive narrative in *Midnight's Children*, but the awareness of 'filial anxiety' and the violent urge to condemn a country described as 'a

failure of the dreaming mind,' whose history is reduced to vulgar gossip, whose political personalities are seen to 'lack the dimensions necessary for tragedy.'

It is perhaps possible to see a similar ambivalence in the treatment of Islam in *The Satanic Verses*. The dream sequences in the novel read as variations around the theme of religion, and in particular, Islam. The narrative of the novel alternates between an 'allegorised' modern tale, and the 'off-centred' documentation of a particular religious history. The magic realist elements of the one highlight the mystical/religious overtones of the other, lending both an air of indeterminacy as to what is real and what is fiction, imagination or madness. In the light of such a fictional strategy, it is ironic, not to mention disingenuous, when Rushdie defends himself against the argument of 'deliberate offence' by saying that 'to treat fiction as if it were fact, is to make a serious mistake of categories. The case of *The Satanic Verses* may be one of the biggest category mistakes in literary history.' To be fair, Rushdie used this line of argument only in television and newspaper interviews, where it would function as a useful catch-phrase, and to counter basic errors of reading and decontextualising. Certain furious and influential sources *did* transfer the lines of certain characters, such as the men of Jahilia, who delude themselves into believing the charade of the prostitutes who impersonate the prophet's wives, and find it a turn-on, straight to the author's tongue, as 'Rushdie calls the mothers of the faithful prostitutes.'

The simplified notion of a 'category mistake,' however, is still reminiscent of the particular passage in *Shame* where, albeit buried beneath layers of irony, precisely such notions of clear categorisation, and the possible readings and reactions are complicated (Ironically, the 'fiction is fiction. Facts are facts' (p.272) argument is used by Billy

Battuta, the ultimate amoral fraudster in the novel, to convince Gibreel to film a new 'theological' based on his nightly visions of Jahilia after Gibreel has expressed his concern that this would be seen as blasphemous.) The collective chuckle that was the literary response to the oft-quoted Muslim reactions to the novel - 'Rushdie calls Mohammed a dirty name,' 'Rushdie calls the first believers bastards and fools,' 'Rushdie calls the prophet's wives prostitutes,' also chose to ignore the point that the Islamic passages are not 'just fiction', or 'modern fairy tale', the 'seriousness' of which is in any case asserted by Rushdie elsewhere, and as such far removed from realism and the serious readings that realism would have merited, but closely-observed and written confabulations based around the historically documented origins of an existing religion. It is undeniable that misreadings, or even naive and paranoid and hostile readings of *The Satanic Verses* were rife in the hysteria following its publication, so much so that a mythical book, a conspiracy to destroy Islam and particularly the Muslim community in Britain, containing 'insults and abuse,' 'a calculated attempt to vilify and slander Mohammed' took on an independent life of its own.⁷ This bears little relation to the actual published work, but this does not alter the fact that *The Satanic Verses* does present itself as blasphemy, does vulgarise characters from Islamic history, and did end up being used as a weapon for racist agendas, despite the repeated protestations of its writer.

The fictional status of *The Satanic Verses* certainly allows for the argument that the specific place and fictionalised treatment of Islam are seen mostly, though not always, through the point of view of one character. But still, the statement that it is fiction, therefore categorically inoffensive and unpunishable, is far too close to the readerly naivete that Rushdie ironised in *Shame*. If Indira Gandhi was not making a 'category

mistake' in taking offence at her portrayal as a vindictive and murderous black widow in *Midnight's Children*, and Benazir Bhutto's representation as 'virgin ironpants' in *Shame* raised a few eyebrows, not least about questions of taste, then the picture of the 'businessman prophet' who eventually gives in to a self-obsessed and divinely-sanctioned lechery and opportunism is similarly not divorced from the world as some mythical category, just 'fiction,' or 'modern fairy-tale.' The statement 'nobody need get upset, or take anything too seriously' (*Shame*, p.70) is more convincing as textual irony than as a defense of *The Satanic Verses* as non-realistic fiction.

Rushdie emphasises that the Jahilia scenes represent a dream dreamt by a character and as such cannot be taken as reflections of Rushdie's own position, and more importantly do not implicate him. Though it is correct that the Jahilia sections are neatly framed in the text within quotation marks attributing them to Gibreel Farishta, the defence based on such distinctions is certainly not only invalid as it simplifies and sanitises Rushdie's relation to his text, but it is also patronising to its audience. It is possible, however, to argue that a degree of ambivalence toward the subject matter, much subtler than suggested by the extreme and violent reactions the text engendered, is discernible here, as it was in *Shame*.

The construction of the textual author is even more ambiguous in *The Satanic Verses* than in *Shame*, presenting us with a picture of an author who seems to be attempting to absent himself from the realm of his characters, particularly as a moral force, and confusing them, not least Gibreel, in the process. In an interview shortly after the release of *The Satanic Verses* but before it became embroiled in the Rushdie affair, Rushdie drew comparisons between authorship and divine creation, and commented that the

common wisdom of the phrase 'God moves in mysterious ways' is applicable to artistic creation, in this case, novel-writing. In his extension of this familiar maxim to fiction, Rushdie suggests the absence of any 'moral connection between the invented world and the inventor,' and that 'invented people cannot comprehend the morality of the inventor.'⁸

Appearing personally in various scenes in *The Satanic Verses*, Rushdie mimics an ambiguous author/god, one who claims to exercise self-restraint in not explaining his methods and reasoning to his characters:

I'm saying nothing. Don't ask me to clear things up one way or the other; the time of revelations is long gone... Where's the pleasure if you're always intervening to give hints, change the rules, fix the fights? Well I've been pretty self-controlled up to this point and I don't plan to spoil things now (p.408-9).

This somewhat teasing attempt at a hands-off approach contrasts not only with Rushdie's textual personae in previous novels, but with other images of writers as characters in this particular text as well. This author figure does not enter into defensive, self-justifying discussions with imagined readers, nor does he feel the need to justify the propriety of his textual methods and subject matter.

The mischievously withheld omniscience of this god ('we are not obliged to explain our nature to you' (p.319)) who resembles a 'myopic scrivener' remains questionable and ambiguous, as does his origin, the location of his voice, and significantly, his morality. He makes an anti-climactic, small hours of the morning appearance in the bedroom of the delusional Gibreel, in the shape of a 'man about the same age as himself, of medium height, fairly heavily built, with salt-and-pepper beard cropped close to the line of the jaw... balding, seemed to suffer from dandruff and wore glasses. This was not the

Almighty he had expected' (p.318). He claims to be 'Ooparvala... The Fellow Upstairs,' and challenged by Gibreel to prove that he is not 'the other One... Neechayvala, the Guy from Underneath' he refuses, enigmatically using the royal 'We' and declining even to clarify if he is 'pure, stark, extreme' or 'multiform, plural, representing the union-by-hybridization of such opposites as *Oopar* and *Neechay*' (p.319) He does, however, convince Gibreel of his existence, as the source of the revelations that fill his dreams, and urges him to leave Alleluia's side, casting her in the role of 'adversary' (synonym for Shaitan, her name also echoes Al-Lat, Allah's adversary in the theology of Jahilia). Thus Gibreel, having received much needed confirmation of his dream-vision role as the archangel, starts wandering the streets of London, in his angelic quest to redeem the 'metamorphosed city' (p.321) by making it conform to his own, and this deity's, extreme essentialist vision: 'When you looked through an angel's eyes you saw essences not surfaces' (p.320).

In various appearances this textual author uses a proliferation of religious terminology, drawn from sources as various as Hindu theology, images of the Prime Mover ('the rules of Creation are pretty clear; you set things up, you make them thus and so, and then you make them roll' (p.408)), Blakean identification with the devil, the adversary ('I know, devil talk, Shaitan interrupting Gibreel. Me?' (p.93)) to a more traditional, omniscient/omnipotent monotheism. Masquerading as such a shifting, capricious form of divinity, the role of this myopic - drawn to comically resemble Rushdie - scrivener/Deity, and his relationship with his artistic/divine creation, Gibreel, is almost playfully malevolent, mysterious, and certainly not 'moral.'

Rekha Merchant, Gibreel's abandoned ex-lover's ghost, plays the part of another feminine adversary to this religious apparition. Mocking Gibreel's archangelic status ('Archangel my foot. Gibreel janab, you're off your head, take it from me. You played too many winged types for your own good' (p.323)). Singing verses of doubt and retribution, pursuing Gibreel with a vengeful purposefulness, she is justifiably suspicious even of the authenticity of this myopic Deity, let alone his trustworthiness. Gibreel, however, faced with the problem of Rekha's new-found proficiency with comparative religion (she gives him a detailed lecture on the question of whether the functions of good and evil are indeed separate, as in Islam, or attributes or functions of the same entity), decides that she is not, after all, his 'inner demon,' a 'guilt-produced shade,' but an 'emissary of this God, an external, divine antagonist' (p.324). This is Gibreel in schizophrenia, already subscribing to an essentialist, religious model in which good and evil are seen in extremity and opposition, and externalised, as opposed to a secular vision which would internalise the categories of good and evil.

Doubt and certainty wage war on each other in all the religious parables Rushdie creates in the novel, each represented in shifting dichotomies of the masculine and the feminine. In this version, it is the Rushdie look-alike author of Gibreel's dreams that appears as a masculine figure of certainty, and the morality of this certainty, and the action it pushes Gibreel into, is not only highly questionable, befitting the moral scheme of the novel, but not even comprehensible. The feminine figure casting doubt on the authenticity of this deity and his message, is Rekha Merchant, floating on her Bokhara carpet, speaking 'Satanic verses' (p.7) of her own, reminding him of the possibility of earthly love that he betrayed once with Rekha, and will do again with Alleluia.

In later discussions of *The Satanic Verses* this framing image of the author, who seems modelled largely after Blake, and his ambiguous relationship to morality and authorial certainty has been largely ignored and the two representations of authorship in the Jahilia sequences cited as prophetic, preempting Rushdie's own fate: Baal the political satirist who faces the wrath of the governing prophet and Salman the immigrant scribe ('Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven... To set your words against the Words of God' (p.374)) who is driven to testing his prophet's genuineness and his own belief and loyalty by putting his own word beside Allah's. Another figure, Jumpy Joshi, who makes agonised, and private attempts at poetry from his room above the Shandaar cafe in London, seems to be important, especially in contrast to Baal, a contrast which problematises the author's own relationship to writing, and the status of such writing as morally accountable action.

The confusion of the location of divinity/creativity and its connection with morality is explored in several figures in the novel, who lay claim to different forms of authorship. 'Writers and whores,' Mahound exclaims in his final refusal of mercy to Baal, the dissident poet of Jahilia, 'I see no difference here' (p.392). Baal's first appearance in the novel as a young satirist is indeed whorish - he sells his satirical services to the highest bidder. We first come across Baal in conversation with the Grandee of Jahilia, Abu Simbel (The Abu Sufyan of history, crossed with an Egyptian dam - we meet the name Sufyan later, in the person of a classically-educated Bangladeshi cafe owner in London), arch-enemy of Mahound. Jahilia is a thriving mercantalist centre, tradesmen from around Arabia gather in scenes of Oriental splendour and boisterousness: scents and spices, silver and gold, arms and grain, 'gambling, drinking and dance' (p.96) abound. The images are drawn nostalgically in technicolour, products of an imagination reared on the

excessiveness and multiplicity of Bombay and its talkies, combined with the Orientalist fascination with, as well as a prurient Islamic revulsion at the sensuality of such a bygone picture. It is a day or so before the annual poetry competition, and the Grandee has a commission in mind when he lightly, menacingly warns Baal about the vicious reputation of his satiric verse ('Look out or we'll have to draw those teeth for you'):

The boy is unabashed... 'For every one you pull out, a stronger one will grow, biting deeper, drawing hotter spurts of blood... A poet's work... to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.' And if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him. He is the satirist, Baal (p.97).

It is a grandiose and youthfully arrogant posture that Baal assumes, combining a self-aggrandising view of the function he has as a young poet, with a comfortably amoral distance from the 'rivers of blood' that might ensue. But this absolutist vision he has of himself as an artist turns out to be more than open to persuasion and the threat of power. Baal ends up a 'servant of the state,' (p.98) a position he had declared unworthy of the artist, given no choice by the powerful Grandee. He finds fame as the lampoonist of 'Submission,' drawing blood from and nourishing his reputation by the wounds he inflicts on the new religion, even though his motivation had been based on something less than moral and artistic integrity.

The same figure of speech borrowed from the famous 'rivers of blood' prophecy of Enoch Powell, is utilised by another aspiring poet: Jumpy Joshi. This time the quotation is acknowledged, and the poet is here mocked by a less powerful, but more ambiguous tormentor than Abu Simbel: Hanif Johnson, the successful lawyer, half-Indian co-

resident of the Shandaar cafe, who has found a draft poem titled 'The River of Blood' in Jumpy's room:

'We got a poet in our midst, Sufyan Sahib. Treat with respect. Handle with care. He says a street is a river and we are the flow; humanity is a river of blood, that's the poet's point. Also the individual human being... In our very bodies, does the river of blood not flow?' *Like the Roman*, the ferrety Enoch Powell had said, *I seem to see the river Tiber foaming with much blood*. Reclaim the metaphor, Jumpy Joshi had told himself. Turn it; make it a thing we can use. 'This is like rape,' he pleaded with Hanif. 'For God's sake, stop' (p.186, Rushdie's italics).

Unlike Baal, Jumpy Joshi cannot reconcile himself and his writing to the possibility of complicity with power - this is a writer constitutionally unsuited to inflicting wounds of any kind, let alone finding nourishment in them. And unlike Hanif Johnson, he is crippled by his self-doubt, his self-conscious relationship to words, texts, particularly the English language, and its connection to power. Jumpy Joshi's collision with what he terms 'the real language problem' (p.281) - not the ability to use it, but to deal with its complicity with oppression - leads to self-defeat: his weak, convoluted poetry stops short of reflecting the painful intellectual process of postcolonial appropriation and subversion that went into its making, and remains shut in his desk drawer, rendering him impotent in word and in political action. He is characteristically self-aware of the defeatism of his beliefs, and of the fact that his resentment of Hanif might be 'primarily linguistic,' (p.281) but the ultimate site of conflict is the connection between language and power that Hanif does, and Jumpy doesn't, take advantage of:

Hanif was in perfect control of the languages that mattered: sociological, socialistic, black-radical, anti-anti-anti-racist, demagogic, oratorical, sermonic: the vocabularies of power. *But you bastard you rummage in my drawers and laugh at my stupid poems. The real language problem: how to bend it shape it, how to let it be our freedom, how to repossess its poisoned wells, how to master the river of words of time of blood: about all that you haven't got a clue*. How hard the struggle, how inevitable the

defeat. *Nobody's going to elect me to anything. No power base, no constituency: just the battle with the words...* But [Jumpy] wouldn't have known how, even if he'd thought of, he'd never have dared. Language is courage: the ability to conceive a thought, to speak it, and by doing so make it true (p.281, Rushdie's italics).

By Blakean descriptions, Baal is the true poet, who, like Hanif Johnson, has the 'firm persuasion that a thing is so' and by speaking it, can 'make it so.'⁹ And Jumpy Joshi, widely regarded by his friends as a man 'in training to be a saint,' (p.179) haunted by his own necessary powerlessness, is unable to fulfil the function of a poet, as described by Baal - 'to take sides, start arguments, stop the world from going to sleep' (p.97) - because of his crippling code of morality, the lack of any moral distance between himself, his subject matter, and possible audience.

Peter François, in his essay 'Philosophical Materialism in *The Satanic Verses*' concentrates on one of the many textual authors who appear in the novel.¹⁰ François defines the God-writer figure who appears at Gibreel's bedside as an 'implicit devotee of Plato's dualistic philosophy' (p.306), whose idealistic/essentialist ethos is only placed in the novel to be later refuted and expunged through a materialist dialectic. François describes the structure of the first eight chapters of the novel as 'counterpoint,' 'a structural scaffolding erected by Rushdie to, ironically, bolster up an idealist line of thought which he detests' (p.305). In this idealist scaffolding, the alternating chapters placed in the historical/objective/ realistic (within the magic realist terms of the novel)/material world of London, and the visionary/subjective/dream realm of the Jahilia chapters, correspond, in Platonic terms, to the worlds of 'becoming' (metamorphosis, migration, compromise, doubt, Lucretius) and 'being' (rootedness in religion and culture, certainty, essences, Ovid). The counterpointing of these two strands, François argues, is

done in a 'non-Dialectic,' 'complementary, unity enhancing manner' (p.305), until, finally, the idealist/essentialist structure collapses with the apocalyptic burning of the Shandaar cafe, and the return of the narrative to the material world of Bombay. The unifying principle of these two worlds, by means of Prospero-like unlimited magic powers, is 'the fictional centre of consciousness who inscribes within this essentialist frame of reference both world and man, objective and subjective reality... no less than a God-writer' (p.306). The purpose of François's essay is to demonstrate that 'Rushdie's dialectical art in the *Verses* pits historical relativity against substantialist assumptions, existence against essence, becoming against being' (p.308).

London, with its ambiguities, 'moral fuzziness' (p.354) and metamorphosing inhabitants, is, to Gibreel, encouraged by the myopic scrivener, the 'shadowy cave-world of history' (François, p.306) and 'becoming.' In his dreams, through the myth and iconology of the origins of Islam, Gibreel tries to resolve the dilemma of idealism versus materialism, overcome his doubt and 'rise above' the material world, through religion, into a world of extremes, the 'non-sensory realm of ideas' (François, p.306) - withdrawing from the world of human ambiguity to an essentialist certainty. François also argues that this dualistic categorisation accounts for the distinction between Gibreel and Saladin, the idealism of one is expressed in his 'rootedness,' 'the inflexibility of an exclusive idea,' religious as well as cultural, and the other embodies the spirit of compromise: 'Farishta's patronizing attitude to Chamcha throughout the book boils down to 'essence's deprecatory view of 'becoming' (p.307).

The tendency of François's argument seems to be to tidy this overwhelmingly rambling book, extracting a strict philosophical order from its self-contradicting habits. The

'dualistic' author that pushes Gibreel into an essentialist frame of mind, is in fact arguably quite distinct from the Blakean model who insistently, if quietly and intermittently, identifies with the devil, and thrives on this adversarial energy, in which, Baal-like, his function seems to be 'to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments' (p.97).

Though the notions of 'being' and 'becoming' are useful to a reading of the novel, their straightforward equation with the two protagonists seems to somewhat flatten the complexities of the figures of Gibreel and Saladin: While this stark opposition seems to be favoured by Gibreel in his archangelic delusion, Saladin's acceptance of the ethos of materialism and historical relativity through compromise is part of the novel's resolution, and the key to his eventual survival, rather than the principle he operates on in his migrancy. As a migrant, he is just as much an essentialist as the schizophrenic Gibreel, except that the ideal he subscribes to is that of Englishness, which he envisions in a version that the actually existing England does not seem to offer: 'Had he not pursued his own idea of *the good*, sought to become that which he most admired, dedicated himself with a will bordering on obsession to the conquest of Englishness?' (p.256, Rushdie's *italics*). Englishness is defined by Saladin as 'assiduity, fastidiousness, moderation, restraint, self-reliance, probity, family life: what did these add up to if not a moral code?' (p.257) and mocked by Pamela as 'warm beer, mince pies, common-sense and me' (p.175)). Saladin's metamorphosis to a devil/goat at the hands of racist police is the punishment of an essentialist: 'This isn't England,' he thinks to himself, bundled into the back of a police van, declaring, in vain, his Britishness ('my good fellows, you had best understand your mistake before it's too late' (p.159)) to the three officers who treat his metamorphosis 'as if it were the most banal and familiar matter they could imagine' (p.158). Undressing him to expose his goatishness ('Opening time, Packy; let's see what

you're made of!' (p.157)), they cart him off to a sanatorium similarly populated with illegal immigrants metamorphosed to the freaks of the authorities' racist essentialist vision.

The issue of authenticity and essentialism, with their moral overtones, is introduced as early as the first page. Though the reference is veiled to a non-subcontinental reader, the connection of the flight number and Gibreel's song explained by Srinivas Aravamudan is fascinating in its sharpness: Flight AI-420, the plane carrying the two protagonists which explodes over the coast of Dover, Aravamudan shows to be a reference to Section 420 of the Indian Code of Criminal Procedure. This section covers, in the popular imagination, according to Aravamudan's explanation, anything from 'small-scale fraud and confidence tricks' to 'the more significant villainy of politicians and businessmen.'¹¹ Each of these, of course, have their representatives in the novel, through characters as various as Thatcher, Saladin's television mogul boss, the rulers of Jahilia, Abu Simbel and Hind, Mahound himself, the exiled Imam, Billy Battuta the 'Brickhall' night-club owner and fraudster, Whisky Sisodia, unscrupulous film producer.

The film named after the code, *Shri Charsawbees* (Mr 420) further emphasises the reference - the protagonist of this Raj Kapoor film, Raju, leaves his rural home and travels 420 miles to Bombay to make his fortune, and meets the seductive Maya Devi ('goddess of illusion'), who introduces him to the 'unsavoury methods of making a fast buck' (Aravamudan, p.191). His melodramatic redemption comes in the form of the reaffirmation of his humble origins and place in the world. The righteously portrayed equation between travel, aspiration to change and moral corruption is clearly a parallel to the histories of Saladin and Gibreel. But the notion of fraud is perhaps even more

interesting: Shri Charsawbees is guilty of shifty business dealings, but the more serious instance of fraud here is a denial of his authenticity, in denying his rural essence in an attempt to change for the better. This is Saladin's crime, his blasphemy and his 'fraud.' The descriptions of Gibreel and Saladin as 'true' and 'false' according to their 'rootedness' or their ambition to effect a 'willing reinvention of self' (p.427) through travel, as in the film, are based on this nativist and essentialist model of authenticity versus fraudulence, which, read in the postcolonial and migrant contexts, ascribes 'goodness' to a very limited version of postcolonial selfhood.

For all its reputation as a vast and serious, even unreadable book and its violent history, *The Satanic Verses* starts cheerfully and incongruously, with a song. Incongruously too, since these first few pages describe a plane crash over England, Rushdie's version of 'the Fall':

Out of thin air: a big bang, followed by falling stars. A universal beginning, a miniature echo of the birth of time ... The jumbo jet *Bostan*, Flight AI-420, blew apart without any warning, high above the great, rotting, beautiful, snow-white, illuminated city, Mahogonny, Babylon, Alphaville... While at Himalayan height a brief and premature sun burst into the powdery January air (p.4).

This recalls an earlier reference by Rushdie, in 'Imaginary Homelands,' to migrants as 'postlapsarian men and women' (p.15). Given that the name of the plane, 'Bostan' means garden, and that the imagery of angels and devils has already been introduced into the text, the implication is clear. The imagery of the Fall introduces a religious sense of dualism, prefiguring the two protagonists' transformation into angelic/devilish forms. In typical Rushdie fashion, the allusions are not transparent, though some, like the Himalayan reference, find echoes later in the book.

Reading these early pages, Aravamudan also deciphers numerical and aviation references to Sanjay and Rajiv Gandhi, and others to recent Indian politics. This level of density is most probably lost on most readers of the novel, as is the nuance of Indianisms in the dialogue. It is a feature of this novel, even more so, perhaps, than *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*, that it is bound to half-readings, and codes that resist all being deciphered by one reader. The Bombay-Indian references are an obvious mystery to most Western readers. So are the Islamic ones, which have an aura of familiarity for the ordinary Muslim reader, but are rich with academic and historical detail that evade all but the specialised scholar. The territory is familiar to the reader of Rushdie, and constitutes part of the innovation and charm of his writing. But this is arguably his most defiant practice of his brand of multiple-coding since *Grimus*, which he had himself labelled 'too clever for its own good.'

But the 'Fall' it is, and a specifically migrant one, with a plane full of Indians making a sudden and traumatic descent towards the shores of England, 'mingling with the remnants of the plane, equally fragmented, equally absurd, there floated the debris of the soul, broken memories, sloughed-off selves, severed mother-tongues, violated privacies, untranslatable jokes, extinguished futures, lost loves, the forgotten meaning of hollow, booming words, *land, belonging, home*' (p.4). Making his entrance into such familiar fictional Rushdie terminology, Gibreel sings his signature tune, an 'impromptu gazal:'

'To be born again,' sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, 'first you have to die. Ho ji! Ho ji! To land upon the bosomy earth, first one needs to fly. Tat-taa! Takathun!... How to win the darling's love, mister, without a sigh? Baba, if you want to get born again...' (p.3).

This, we later find, is typical of the man: cheerful, vocal and vulgar, Gibreel bursts into a song of reincarnation, comparing a lover's tiff to death and rebirth, celebrating mystical

notions he does not understand in earthy language, mixing dance commands, and possibly movements of Bharata Natyam with the idiomatic romanticism of the Urdu gazal, he hurtles towards England, singing.

Gibreel is an uncomprehending hybrid and mimic, just as much as he is, in his dreams and delusions, an unwilling communicator of divine revelation. His star-status, as a highly paid and capricious Muslim actor impersonating in commercial film versions ('theologicals' in the novel, the genre is referred to as 'mythologicals' in real-life Bombay-talkie terminology) practically any god in the Hindu pantheon, does not necessarily lend itself to easy notions of ethnic fluidity, exacerbated as it is by the fact that Gibreel is then, and remains later, unaware of the series of symbolic mantles he is unconsciously donning. Unlike his fellow casualty of the plane wreck, Salahuddin Chamchawalla-turned-Saladin Chamcha's purposeful recreations of himself, Gibreel's cheerful espousal of Hindu-sounding notions of rebirth and regeneration are based on an ultimately catastrophic lack of self-knowledge, for he remains, at heart, what Rushdie calls an 'untranslated man' (p.427).

Chamcha's particular brand of self-delusion on the other hand, is the belief, central to his existence, that he can not only recreate himself, but choose the exact terms of the recreation as well, that he is the master of his hybridity and metamorphosis. Chamcha's hitherto controlled transformation takes an alarming turn and spirals out of his control with the plane crash that destroys the life he had built for himself in England, and the persona he still clings to while reentering his adopted country somewhat unusually. Saladin's fall in fact repeats the pattern that creates his identity: faced with a stereotype of Indianness in Gibreel, he enacts a stereotype of Englishness, the dream-like, idealised

qualities of 'poise and moderation.' Saladin during his fall is 'buttony, pursed.' As opposed to the 'prancing' Gibreel who 'embraces air,' Saladin 'nosedives' (p.4). 'O, my shoes are Japanese... These trousers English, if you please. On my head, red Russian hat; my heart's Indian for all that,' Gibreel sings, translating the song from *Shri Charsawbees* (p.5);¹² compelling Saladin to fight back 'with verses of his own.' 'at Heaven's command... aroooooose from the aaaazure main... and guardian aaaaangels sung the strain' (p.6).

The aggressive Englishness and sense of propriety with which Saladin confronts the larger than life Gibreel is carefully grounded in a background similar to Rushdie's own: upper-class Bombay Muslim upbringing, inhospitable years at an English boarding school where the young Saladin attempts to 'conquer' England by coming to grips with the kipper on his breakfast plate under the unhelpful gaze of his schoolmates, and marriage to an English woman with the Richardsonian name of Pamela Lovelace. Saladin spends his life in England in a pathological struggle to conquer it, to become British, and erase all traces of Indianness from his voice, his manner, and his memory, severing all contact with his father in Bombay. After the fall from the Bostan, and the relative paradise of his self-delusion, having been arrested by police unwilling to accept his British citizenship, and officially dead in the plane crash, Saladin finds himself hiding at the heart of the Asian community in London that he had tried so hard to avoid, repelling their invitation to rest and take stock of his metamorphosis among 'his own people.' Aware that his existence is surreally metamorphosing out of his control, Saladin feels the need to 'remind himself of himself' by repeating his migrant-metropolitan identity description like a mantra:

I am a real man, he told the mirror, with a real history and a planned-out future. I am a man to whom certain things are of importance: rigour, self-

discipline, reason, the pursuit of what is noble without recourse to that old crutch, God. The ideal of beauty, the possibility of exaltation, the mind. I am: a married man (p.135-6).

It is interesting to note that Saladin has real-life predecessors, both of whom get a brief mention in the novel, whose self-exile is born of a desire for a metropolitan self-definition: V.S. Naipaul and Nirad Chaudhuri. Both figures have had sharp criticism for the misdemeanour of denying their roots. Ironically, it is now Rushdie himself who fills that role.

The Satanic Verses is about the rivalry of two men, and their differing conceptions of postcolonial Indian selfhood. Their similarities are as striking as their differences: both characters are Indian, both Muslim, from Bombay, both immigrants, both actors, concerned professionally and in their personal lives with recreating themselves, and both finding themselves metamorphosing out of control after their 'fall': Gibreel finds himself haloed and thrust into the role of angel-messenger-messiah, and Saladin grows horns and a tail, and in his devilish shape, becomes a reluctant race-hero in London, where he had formerly cultivated his elegant cosmopolitan facade. But despite the polarised images, the two men are described, once again in terminology reminiscent of Blake, as conjoined opposites.

For Saladin, Gibreel is anathema. He embodies all that Saladin ever tried to escape from in his flight away from India. But this is nevertheless as much a tale of bonding as it is of confrontation. At different locations in the novel, the two men are friends and enemies, they are one another's saviours and betrayers. It is the passive betrayal of Gibreel - in not telling the police of Saladin's identity and citizenship, resulting in his

arrest and nightmarish, surreal incarceration with similarly metamorphosed immigrants in a detention hostel - that Saladin focuses on and wreaks terrible revenge for, not the other betrayals that surround his post-accident life: his English wife, too, refuses to acknowledge him, becoming his best friend's lover, he is fired from his lucrative television job, the English state betrays him, by refusing his attempts at integration. These Saladin disregards, and directs his bitter energy against Gibreel, with a force only equalled by his hatred of his quintessentially Indian father. They are not only each other's undoing, but in enigmatic passages at the end of the novel, each other's redemption.

The notion of blasphemy is central not only to the furore that surrounded *The Satanic Verses*, but also to the construction of the text of the novel itself. I have discussed in an earlier chapter the tone of the protest against the novel and its author, showing that it was rarely couched in religious terms only - in fact, Rushdie's fictional betrayal was more often than not expressed through communal and even familial expressions of intimacy betrayed, and a cultural background vilified. This confluence of terminology takes place in the novel as well, where blasphemy is not simply Gibreel Farishta's crime, for 'stuffing... dead pigs into his face' (p.30) and his nocturnal revisions of the religion of his birth, but Saladin Chamcha's as well, for his cultural transgressions, against his father, and his Indianness. In fact, the questions of loyalty and betrayal that are bound up in discourses of blasphemy, religious or cultural, are used as mirror images of the sort of self-questioning guilt inherent in the recreation of postcolonial selves.

The Satanic Verses is a novel of many self enclosed parts, and movements. Saladin and Gibreel move from Bombay to London, seeking change, each blasphemous in his own way. Then they return to Bombay almost simultaneously (the second time round for

Saladin, whose back and forth journeys and hesitations are less dramatic than Gibreel's, but more intricately presented) and their origins, in an attempt at restoration. But ironically, and significantly, it is not the rooted, untranslated and quintessentially Indian Gibreel who survives the return, but Saladin, who had cut the tree of his childhood, and attempted to fashion himself after another image.

The first chapter of this unchronological book, 'The Angel Gibreel,' starts with the fall of the two post-colonial angels onto London, but then returns to the origins of the two protagonists, and gives us a picture of two very distinct Indian/postcolonial childhoods. The contrast is at times similar to the archetypal rivalry of alter-egos that Rushdie had created in *Midnight's Children*, Saleem and Shiva, in that Saladin and Gibreel represent two social classes worlds apart from one another, and each typical of Rushdie's image of postcolonial India. Saladin is from an 'Ariel' class of the colonial elite; he lives in a neighbourhood much like Saleem's, and Rushdie's own, on a Bombay hilltop, looking symbolically westward over the Indian ocean. Gibreel, on the other hand, is Caliban to Saladin's Ariel, a boy from the slums of Poona, whose success, much as his later migration, happens by accident, on the strength and motivation of someone else's will (his mother, Babasaheb Mhatre, Alleluia, Rosa Diamond, and in the dreams, Mahound). But the implied communal contrast between the upper-class Muslim Saleem and the outcast Hindu Shiva does not appear here. Both Muslims, Saladin and Gibreel are minorities in India before they become so in England, giving their religious and cultural blasphemy a sharper edge of belonging and betrayal.

Though he comes from an ordinary observant Muslim family, Gibreel's religious identity is confused even before his 'Phantom Bug' (p.11) and mystery recovery shake his belief,

and his union with Alleluia leads him to dreams of rebirth in another country. 'Reincarnation was always a big topic with Gibreel' (p.11) declares the narrator of *The Satanic Verses*, and goes on to compare Gibreel's disappearance from the Indian scene to the 'death of God', and his reappearance, 'rebirth: that's God's stuff too.' Gibreel as an actor had made a career out of being godly, against the grain. His face is 'the most profane of faces, the most sensual of faces' but still 'inextricably mixed up with holiness, perfection, grace' (pp.16-17). Later, in his dreams of Jahilia, this conflicting mixture reappears, in the personality of the businessman-prophet.

The young Gibreel's faith is 'low-key' though confused (His birth name was Ismail Najmuddin, 'Ismail after the child involved in the sacrifice of Ibrahim, and Najmuddin *star of the faith*;¹³ he'd given up quite a name when he took the angel's' (p.17)), and he is already given to blasphemous visions and dreams, in which he identifies with Mohammed, comparing 'his own condition with that of the Prophet at the time when, having been orphaned and short of funds, he made a great success of his job as the business manager of the wealthy Khadija, and ended up marrying her as well.' Curiously, as the same dream continues, he sees himself as the prophet's first wife, Khadija, as well, though in an Indian transformation, 'sitting on a rose-strewn dais, simpering shyly beneath the sari-pallu... while his new husband, Babasaheb Mhatre, reached lovingly towards him' (p.22).

The unconscious semi-blasphemies and inconsistencies of Gibreel's mother's superstitions and fairy-tales converge in the adolescent's mind with the protective paternal mantle of Babasaheb Mhatre's (his boss and protector, who takes the young Gibreel into his house after he is orphaned) Hinduism and spiritualism. With an

uncharacteristic bent for culture that his later vulgar persona belies, the young actor spends his time reading Greek philosophy with a taste for theories of the transcendental:

To get his mind off the subject of love and desire, he studied... devouring the metamorphic myths of Greece and Rome, the avatars of Jupiter... Circe, everything; and the theosophy of Annie Besant, and unified field theory, and the incident of the Satanic verses in the early career of the prophet, and the politics of Muhammad's harem after his return to Mecca in triumph; and the surrealism of the newspapers, in which butterflies could fly into young girls' mouths... (pp.23-4).

Later on in London, he finds a copy of Blake's 'Marriage of Heaven and Hell' in Alleluia's flat, and his dream portrait of Mahound's 'Return to Jahilia' carries echoes of the Blakean model, as well as the national and personal overtones that mono- and polytheism has in Gibreel's make-up, and the ambivalence towards the position and power that women have in both cultures. We are thus provided with the chaotic consciousness that lies behind the realistic minutiae of the origins of Gibreel's blasphemous dreams, in his Indian childhood and adolescence. It is during his apprenticeship in the acting world, playing the foolish foil to romantic leads, and tormented by the feeling that he is 'endowed with a larger-than-usual capacity for love, without a single person on earth to offer it to,' that Gibreel starts making a conscious effort to 'blot out' (p.24) his need for earthly love, by acquiring transcendental leanings. These contrary leanings are later personified in his 'grand passion' for Alleluia: what they have is bodily, a relationship based on electric sexual compatibility, but what she stands for, with her religious name and transcendentalist passion for mountain-climbing, is in conflict with that motivation.

For Chamcha, on the other hand, the two sides of the psyche that he needs to harmonise are not Islam and Hinduism, mono- and polytheism, religion and secularism, masculine and feminine, but India and England, the roots of father and country versus his adopted

country and assumed persona. On his first flight to freedom, away from Bombay to an English school, Chamcha reiterates his feelings for his father:

Thirteen year-old Salahuddin, setting aside recent doubts and grievances, entered once again his childish adoration of his father, because he had, had, had worshipped him, he was a great father until you started growing a mind of your own, and then to argue with him was called a betrayal of his love, but never mind that now, *I accuse him of becoming my supreme being, so that what happened was like a loss of faith...* Five and a half hours of time zones; turn your watch upside down in Bombay and you see the time in London. *My father*, Chamcha would think, years later, in the midst of his bitterness. *I accuse him of inverting Time* (Rushdie's italics, p.41).

Salahuddin Chamchawalla is born the son of an autocratic, larger-than-life father, and belonging to a culture that pressurises him to be native restrictively, in what he feels should be a freer, wider world. Having lost his mystical childish faith in his father, Saladin becomes 'a secular man, who would do his best, thereafter, to live without a god of any type' (p.43) This transformation in selfhood is akin to that of Aadam Aziz, in the opening pages of *Midnight's Children*, who, having lost his religion, and identification with the home he had travelled away from, is left with a 'God-shaped hole' which he attempts to heal by the bit-by-bit conquest of his future wife. Saladin's project is similar, except that the land of his conquest is not India, but England: at the immigrant's sanatorium in a bewildered state between dream and wakefulness, Saladin sees himself 'making tender love to the Monarch. She was the Body of Britain, the avatar of the state, and he had chosen her, joined with her; she was his beloved, the moon of his delight' (p.169). This mirrors his actual, earlier conquest of England, where he had pursued the blonde, upper class English beauty of Pamela for years, without noticing that her notion of Englishness was quite distinct from his, making theirs 'a marriage of cross purposes.'

Chamcha's father, Changez Chamchawalla, 'Philanthropist, philanderer, living legend, leading light of the nationalist movement' has a 'deep-seated [and in the novel, unexplained] prejudice against books which led [him] to own thousands of the pernicious things in order to humiliate them by leaving them to rot unread.' Another feature of his teak-lined study is a genie-lamp, 'begging to be rubbed,' which, 'one day' Changez promises his son, 'you'll have... for yourself. Then rub and rub as much as you like and see what doesn't come to you. Just now, but, it is mine' (p.36). The compelling inconsistencies of his father forms Chamcha's character and plans in counter-reaction: his later chosen persona is cultured, well-read, gentlemanly, and determined to escape the clutches of India and his father's nationalism. At the bottom of it all is the 'promise of the magic lamp... the notion that one day his troubles would end... that his father would smother all his hopes unless he got away, and from that moment he became desperate to leave, to escape, to place oceans between the great man and himself' (pp.36-7).

Saladin's anglicisation is achieved by escape from India, and the voyage to an English boarding school is attractive, as it would free him from the irrational discipline of his father. The adolescent Salahuddin Chamchawalla forms and utters his first anglophile sentiments when chided by his mother to remember his Indianness among the unclean English ('They wipe their bee tee ems with paper only. Also, they get into each other's dirty bathwater' (p.39)). He decides to 'become the thing his father was-not-could-never-be, that is, a goodandproper Englishman' (p.43). This determination to recreate his identity, becomes his chosen essence: first the transformation away from his father, then, in an attempt to fit into his public school, 'masks that these fellows would recognize, paleface masks, clown masks, until he had fooled them into thinking he was *okay*, he

was *people-like-us*' (p.43). After graduation, it is a natural extension of this career of self-creation that Saladin goes into acting, in another decision that infuriates his father:

When I die... what will I be? A pair of emptied shoes. That is my fate, what he has made for me. This actor. This pretender. He has made himself into an imitator of non-existing men. I have nobody to follow me, to give what I have made. This is his revenge: he steals from me my posterity (p.71).

'How does newness come into the world?' asks Rushdie, or at least his persona in the novel, 'of what fusions, translations, conjoinings is it made?' (p.8). And he offers us a vision: two Indian men, similar in several ways, but radically different in behaviour and intention, arriving in England in a fall, already confrontational, but conjoined as 'Gibreelsaladin Farishtachamcha,' in an 'angelicdevilish fall' (p.5). Out of the combustible encounters of these two men with each other, with the myths that constitute their spiritual and national roots, and incidentally, with women, it seems to be suggested, 'a newness' will be conceivable in terms of a migrant identity, whether it be in England or in India.

'What kind of idea are you? What kind am I?' are the twin questions that recur throughout *The Satanic Verses*. The Sikh terrorist, Tavleen, asks it rhetorically of her cause, while revealing the grenades that line her body 'like extra breasts.' She imagines history demanding, 'what manner of cause are we? Are we uncompromising, absolute, strong, or will we show ourselves to be timeservers, who compromise, trim and yield?' The sight of her body, and the subsequent explosion, 'provided her answer' (p.81). In echoes of the same basic oppositions - absolute/compromising, purity/hybridity, continuity/disruption, assimilation/ preservation, authentic/fraudulent - several characters in the novel demand the answers of themselves and their rivals. Feeling the beginnings of a loss of control

over his subjects, Abu Simbel, the Grandee of Jahilia, questions himself, and sees manipulateness and a survival instinct in his compromising methods. Having been offered and accepted a compromise that will give him more converts to strengthen his budding religion, Mahound fears he has betrayed himself, and questions his nature, as well as Allah's: this is where the future demagogue is at his most sympathetic:

O my vanity, I am an arrogant man, is this weakness, is it just a dream of power?... Is this sensible and wise or is it hollow and self-loving?... Is Allah so unbending that he will not accept three more to save the human race?... Should God be proud or humble, majestic or simple, yielding or un-? *What kind of idea is he? What kind am I?* (p.111, Rushdie's italics).

In different reformulations, the questions come to mean, what kind of nationalist, what kind of cause, what kind of leader, what kind of prophet/religion, what kind of God, and the reader extends the question and the dichotomies it carries to other occasions: what kind of postcolonial, migrant, community, role-model, hero, woman, and perhaps above all, what kind of Indian, at home or abroad.

In 'Imaginary Homelands,' Rushdie discusses the definitions and representations of Indianness in the context of migration, defining it in terms of the urge to protect an Indian identity as opposed to the need to assimilate:

To be an Indian writer in this society is to face, every day, problems of definition. What does it mean to be 'Indian' outside India? How can culture be preserved without becoming ossified? How should we discuss the need for change within ourselves and our community without seeming to play into the hands of our racial enemies? What are the consequences, both spiritual and practical, of refusing to make any concessions to Western ideas and practices? What are the consequences of embracing those ideas and practices and turning away from the ones that came here with us? (p.17)

The problem of how to be a 'good Indian' is raised and questioned in the novel by Zeeny Vakil, Chamcha's childhood friend and later lover, and echoes of this formulation reverberate through the novel:

She was an art critic whose book on the confining myth of authenticity, that folkloristic straitjacket which she sought to replace by an ethics of historically validated eclecticism, for was not the entire national culture based on the principle of borrowing whatever clothes seemed to fit, Aryan, Mughal, British, take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest? 'Meaning is a dead,' she told him when she gave him a copy. 'Why should there be a good, right way of being a wog?.. Actually we are all bad Indians. Some worse than others (p.52).

The idealism and optimism of Zeeny's model of Indianness, though seductive, lacks conviction within the context of the novel, and in relation to the backgrounds of Gibreel and Saladin, whose identity crisis is no longer a matter of an escape from the confinement of 'folkloristic straitjackets,' but is rather an issue of control and authority over their own attributes and destinies. Though the recreation of their selves in various ways is the intention of each character, they are both faced with the fact that this intention is not likely to be exercised within the neutral arena of free-will and choice of Zeeny's conceptual universe, where 'meaning is a dead' in an Indianised version of a metropolitan theory of postmodern identity. Zeeny Vakil's eclecticism is inspired by a notion of cultural excess, and has echoes of a metropolitan consumerist approach to culture and cultural identity, where these are seen as products obtainable in an impersonal, non-culture-bound fashion. Saladin, on the other hand, flits between extreme cultural straitjackets, whether these be folkloristic and conformist or anglophile and reactionary. The identity vacuum of the metropolis, the vagueness of the shifting metropolitan landscape in which 'all causes [are] the same, all histories interchangeable' (p.415), and all identities undifferentiated is as objectionable to him as 'one of the first

reasons his future wife Pamela Lovelace had given for falling in love with him:' that his 'round and cherubic' face has no 'bone structure' (p.135).

In the surreal English landscape in which the two protagonists find themselves, the 'power of description' frequently lies elsewhere. In the scenes of Saladin's incarceration, mentioned above, the racist vision and controlling gaze of immigration authorities override whatever visions of themselves these immigrants, including Saladin, might have. The police officers here speak in catch-phrases of control, power, and domination, all encapsulated in imagery of watching, observation - 'spectating,' 'surveillance,' 'watchfulness,' 'eternal vigilance is the price o'liberty' - while the goatified Saladin, under their describing gaze, can only register his own voice in nonsensical animal noises: 'eek,' cried Chamcha, unable to avoid interrupting. 'Aaargh, unnhh, owoo' (p.162).

Different sources in the novel offer differing explanations for Saladin's goatish state. The policemen's version is straightforward: 'Look at yourself. You're a fucking Packy billy. Sally-who? - what kind of a name is that for an Englishman?' (p.163). The finality of this racist essentialising is reconfirmed to the still doubtful Saladin by a fellow inmate, a creature with 'an entirely human body, but its head was that of a ferocious tiger, with three rows of teeth.' The catalogue of transformations is extensive:

There's a woman over that way... who is now mostly water-buffalo. There are businessmen from Nigeria who have grown sturdy tails. There is a group of holidaymakers from Senegal who were doing no more than changing planes when they were turned into slippery snakes. I myself am in the rag trade; for some years now I have been a highly paid male model, based in Bombay... (p.168).

The manticore disagrees with Saladin's fatalism in the face of their transformation, and, unlike Saladin, ascribes responsibility: 'They describe us... That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct' (p.168).

Taken to an attic room above the Shandaar cafe that is to be his asylum during his goatish days, Saladin's devilish appearance deepens already existing conflicts between family members. For Hind Sufyan, the disgruntled wife of the owner, this is final confirmation of the incomprehensibility of the English world her weak-willed husband has brought her to: 'Now I know the world is mad, when the devil becomes my house guest' (p.253). For the two daughters, Mishal and Anahita, Saladin's 'freakish' appearance is to be admired, lending him street-cred as a potential race-hero: 'Magic. You know. *Extreme*' (p.258). As word gets out to the streets of Saladin's existence in the attic, Mishal's originally childish fascination matures into reflections which echo Zeenat Vakil's ruminations on identity, and Jumpy Joshy's combative relationship with language:

You're a hero. I mean, people can really identify with you. It's an image white society has rejected for so long that we can really take it, you know, occupy it, inhabit it, reclaim it and make it our own. It's time you considered action (pp.286-87).

Jumpy Joshi himself believes in the necessity of taking 'an ideological view of the situation.' After having listed possible 'objective' causes of his friend's altered state ('wrongful arrest, intimidation, violence... illegal detention, unknown medical experimentation in hospital' (p.252)), he offers his ideological reading:

Ideologically... I refuse to accept the position of victim. Certainly, he has been victimized, but we know that all abuse of power is in part the responsibility of the abused; our passiveness colludes with, permits such crimes (p.253).

It is with the classically learned explanation that Mohammad Sufyan, self-educated ex-schoolteacher offers, combined with the victimization theory of Jumpy Joshi, that Saladin eventually chooses to unravel the threads:

'Question of mutability of the essence of the self... has long been subject of profound debate. For example, great Lucretius tells us, in *De Rerum Natura*, this following thing:... "Whatever by its changing goes out of its frontiers," - that is, bursts its banks, - or, maybe, breaks out of its limitations, - so to speak, disregards its own rules... "that thing", at any rate, Lucretius holds, "by doing so brings immediate death to its own self". However... poet Ovid, in the *Metamorphoses*, takes diametrically opposed view. He avers thus: "As yielding wax" - heated, you see, possibly for the sealing of documents or such, - "is stamped with new designs And changes shape and seems not still the same, Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls," - you hear, good sir? Our spirits! Our immortal essences! - "Are still the same forever, but adopt In their migrations ever-varying forms" (p.276-7).

This clear-cut contrast between two distinct types of change/migration - death and rebirth versus unchanging essence underlying change of form - is 'pretty cold comfort' (p.277) to Saladin: if he agrees with Lucretius to accept the primacy of matter, this would mean submitting to his new self as a freak. If, on the other hand, he chose, with Mohammed Sufyan, an Ovidian insistence on the primacy of spirit, the existence of an 'immortal essence' within himself, this would not only negate his lifelong efforts to fashion himself into what he was not born as, but suggest as well that his current devilish shape might be the manifestation of that unalterable essence, that he might indeed be, as Hind supposes, an incarnation of evil.

Saladin before his transformation had defined himself as an idealist and a romantic, a follower of Ovid, in this sense. But the nature of the change he had sought, the symbolic killing of his Indian self, severing his ties from his father, nationality, language,

mannerism, roots, and the painstaking reinscription of his new selfhood in the absence thus created, is a phoenix-from-the-ashes, Lucretian phenomenon.

The paradoxes of his basic project - the annihilation of his Indian self, the recreation of an ideal English one in its place - had been apparent to his friends, especially Pamela, and Jumpy. Believing Chamcha to be dead, Pamela reminds herself of the marriage that had been failing, and her reasons for tolerating it, out of a sense of identification with his project of self-creation:

Had she not invented herself in her own image? I am that I am, she toasted herself Napoleon brandy... I forgave you, that was my fault; I could see the centre of you, that question so frightful that you had to protect it with all that posturing certainty. That empty space (pp.182-3).

Though they are stuck in 'a marriage of cross-purposes,' one party aspiring to what seems like the quintessential Englishness of the other, the other marrying an Indian and getting involved in race relations precisely to negate such insular self-definition, Pamela is able to identify and empathise with Saladin's failed quest. Defending Saladin against Pamela's charge that 'the place never stopped being a picture postcard to him. You couldn't get him to look at what was really real,' Jumpy Joshi is able to pay tribute to his friend's warped romanticism: 'he was a real Saladin... A man with a holy land to conquer, his England, the one he believed in. You were part of it, too' (p.175). Underneath the glorified imagery of quest and holy lands, the nitty gritty of Saladin's daily posturing is represented in images of assumed masks and voices, of acting, an existence as an 'imitator of non-existent men' (p.71), as his furious father had defined his profession in Bombay.

The desperate purposefulness of these reinventions of self are finally revealed in their hopelessness to the goat-shaped Saladin, confined to the shameful secrecy of an attic room in the heart of the community he had tried to escape:

He chose Lucretius over Ovid. The inconstant soul, the mutability of everything, *das Ich*, every last speck. A being going through life can become so other to himself as to *be another*, discrete, severed from history... Zeeny, eclecticism, hybridity. The optimism of those ideas! The certainty on which they rested: of will, of choice! But, Zeeny mine, life just happens to you: like an accident. No: it happens to you as a result of your condition. Not choice, but - at best - process, and at worst, shocking, total change. Newness: he had sought a different kind, but this was what he got...

I am, he accepted, *that I am*.

Submission (pp.288-9, Rushdie's italics).

Crucially, Saladin describes his changed world-view as 'submission.' The word itself echoes the dream-religion of the novel, Islam's translation, and the loss of free-will that the acceptance of an autocratic religion implies. The concept is transferred to the 'immigrant' chapters of the novel, first through the words of the manticore in the asylum ('they describe us, we submit to those descriptions' (p.168)), and then in Jumpy Joshi's victimisation theory. What Saladin describes as the tyranny of a secular worldliness, when powers larger than ourselves control our destiny, robbing us of our faculties of choice and control, the manticore and Jumpy redefine as an almost religious attitude of passivity and fatalism, even if the source of power is a worldly one. Saladin's conversion from the idealism of his conquest of England to the realism of his acceptance of his self as a physical and historical entity, is not the liberating narrative of choice and eclecticism that Zeeny Vakil had wished him to enter into.

Srinivas Aravamudan contrasts the 'relatively monocultural angelic innocence' of Gibreel with the 'multicultural diabolical experience' of Saladin, fitting the allegory into Blakean

and postcolonial terms, before going on to highlight references to a Shakespearean model:

The Shakespearean slots for colonial subjectivity are similarly cross-wired in this novel. While, for Prospero, Caliban was "a devil, a born devil on whose nature / Nurture could never stick," the twist of post-colonial reverse-perspective makes the Ariel figure into the devil, while the schizophrenic, violent, and libidinal Caliban of this theatrical novel is Gibreel, occupying the spot of "angel" (p.200).

Defining the two men as true and false, as well as good and evil, the insistence on the goodness of essence versus the fraudulent evil of turning English has its colonial/postcolonial resonances. This role-reversal and the shifting perspectives on colonial and post-colonial identity is at the heart of the novel, judging and rejudging Gibreel and Saladin as their positions, geographical and mental, change. Not only Ariel and Caliban shift in their representation of good and evil, Bombay and London, the colony and the metropolis change their status as heaven and hell.

The relationships that the two men have with women, Englishwomen in particular, have Shakespearean resonances as well. Both characters try to assimilate through the possession of European women, in an inversion of the colonial paradigm of the confluence of the languages of sexual and political conquest, and a fulfilled repetition of the Caliban/Miranda model in *The Tempest*. In *Midnight's Children*, Aadam Aziz's infatuation with his future wife 'bit by bit' was analogous with his wish to belong to India once again, the country of his birth which he was doomed to see with 'travelled eyes.' In *The Satanic Verses*, the anglicisation and the re-Indianisation of Saladin Chamcha follow similar courses of sexual conquest: first the relentless two-year pursuit of Pamela by the desperate Chamcha who sees in her the image of the Englishness he is aspiring to, then

the project of Zeeny Vakil in Bombay - 'the reclamation of... Mister, we're going to get you back' (p.52) - by a woman who is as voracious sexually as she is politically. 'I put down roots in the women I love' (p.59), Saladin muses, trying to convince himself of the reality of his crumbling marriage to Pamela, in the early days of his affair with Zeeny Vakil. He does, in fact, repeat the pattern of his English days to become Indian: his Indianness is to a large extent after Zeeny's definition, and on the strength of her love.

The Englishwomen in the lives of the two protagonists serve comparable purposes: they embody the aspirations of each character, represent newness, change. Gibreel is attracted to the 'newness' and 'fierceness' of what Alleluia stands for, after his mystery illness and equally mysterious recovery force him to question his existence as a semi-deified movie star and serial adulterer, as well as his loosely-held system of belief in the orthodoxy of Islam. In the iconology of his blasphemous dreams, this is echoed by the rivalry of Mahound/Allah versus Al-lat, the female and polytheistic principles countering the male oneness of the religion of Submission, certainty versus doubt as the basis of his existence.

Gibreel's pursuit of Alleluia Cone is based on a contradiction that I have touched on earlier: She is a negation, as Al-lat and as a real woman, of his previous system of belief: of the authoritarian and masculine monism of Islam; of belief in God, countered by her belief in life for its own sake ('You're alive... You got your life back. *That's* the point' (p.30)); and she impels him towards a negation of his own god-like status as a film star, by uprooting him from his established career and moving him to an anonymous and ambiguous, secular existence in London. But there is also something iconic and transcendental in Gibreel's vision of her, ('To begin again, to be reborn with her, through

her, Alleluia, who had seen the roof of the world' (p.144)): a proud Englishwoman with an 'icequeen' appearance, she is the stuff of colonised dreams of possession and revenge.¹⁴ In Gibreel's dreams, she is not just Al-Lat, the pluralist adversary, but Mount Cone as well, her mountaineering and her surname transformed into the location of Mahound's transcendental vision. Neither is this conflict limited to Gibreel's perspective: with her transcendentalist passion for climbing, tendency to have visionary experiences at the oxygenless top, and the constant secret pain of her fallen arches keeping her from the pursuit of her passion, Alleluia is Silkie, a complex combination of spiritual aspiration and matter-bound physicality.

The women are also sites of conflict and symbols of guilt, and sexual rivalry constitutes an undercurrent of the novel. Stating their claims to other men's women, several male characters define their own identity. Jumpy Joshi conquers Pamela's heart with his ability to share her vision of 'what is really real' in a commitment to political struggle. The consummation of their love comes immediately after their shared repudiation of Saladin's Ariel existence, providing them common ground. Later, having found out that the older Sufyan daughter, Mishal, is sleeping with Hanif Johnson, Jumpy is resentful and jealous - of his possession of the beautiful Mishal ('Damn him for (and here Jumpy shocked himself) being the first.') and his mastery of 'the languages of desire,' along with all the other 'languages that mattered' (p.281). Hanif's possession of Mishal seems to Jumpy, in a moment of guilty realisation, connected to the fact that he is half English, and complicit with power in a way Jumpy is unable to countenance.

Sexual envy and sexual doubt play a part in the conflict of Saladin and Gibreel as well, making Alleluia the victim of a struggle to which she is only peripherally related. Seeing

her by Gibreel's side in London, Saladin focusses on them the anger of his lost love (Pamela is now pregnant with Jumpy's child, whereas Saladin is sterile) and the bitterness of his renewed marginalisation in the country and profession of his choice - both areas in which Gibreel, without trying, is finding success:

Let us appreciate the effect on Chamcha, who loved England in the form of his lost English wife, - of the golden, pale and glacial presence by Farishta's side of Alleluia Cone... he... seems to see, in distant Allie, the entirety of his loss (p.425).

The moment Saladin Chamcha got close enough to Allie Cone to be transfixed, and somewhat chilled, by her eyes, he felt his reborn animosity towards Gibreel extending itself to her, with her degree-zero go-to-hell look, her air of being privy to some great, secret mystery of the universe; also, her quality of what he would afterwards think of as *wilderness*, a hard, sparse thing, anti-social, self-contained, an essence (p.428).

Saladin envies Alleluia her 'essence,' the 'inner certainty' which he ascribes to her, like an extreme, idealised Pamela, making of her an image of selfhood beyond his reach. He is unaware, as is Gibreel to some extent, of her own pain, and her own complexities - she has become 'a character in a story of a kind in which she could never have imagined she belonged' (p.319). The seeming conquest of the metropolis by the unappreciative, unassimilating Gibreel crystallises the conflict between the two men, and the battle is fought over Alleluia's body: Saladin uses his talent for infinite voices, and delivers his own satanic verses over the telephone lines to Gibreel, destroying the sexual certainty of his earthly relationship which he had substituted for his religious certainties. The Caliban/Ariel rivalry of the two men, and their alternative definitions of Indianness/postcolonialism makes Miranda figures of the novel into symbols of the guilt, desire and conflicting and converging projects inherent in the definition of postcolonial selfhood. This draws on a long tradition of colonial literature that uses sexual imagery

as representations of varying power configurations in the colonial encounter. But it also marginalises and objectifies women, a point of which the novel is edgily aware, in its insistence that Pamela and Alleluia are women lost in the wrong narrative (pp.318,340,348) and that they are victims of an injustice perpetrated on them by characters too intent on bypassing them to deal with issues of loyalty and of betrayal in other, political contexts. Meanwhile, women die violent deaths: Rekha Merchant commits suicide, Hind Sufyan and Pamela die in the fire that destroys Shandaar Cafe, Ayesha the seeress drowns, and Alleluia is thrown off Everest by her jealous lover.

Rushdie's addition of women to his text reads as an afterthought, their marginality acknowledged rather than questioned, their confused identities enslaved to casual formulae. Whereas we watch the traumatic transition of Chamcha the devil-hero of the text from naive migrant, aspiring metropolitan, to adult, cosmopolitan post-colonial, Rushdie seems unable to portray women in process or quest, in a novel which he claims is devoted to 'the elevation of the quest for the Grail over the Grail itself.'¹⁵ The women suggest a dichotomy oddly repeated in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia*:¹⁶ women who fail through victimisation, like Allie and Pamela in *The Satanic Verses*, and Eleanor in Kureishi's novel; as opposed to the wise ones, Zeeny and Jamila, committed to straightforward political activism in ways the male characters are prevented from matching, by their ambivalence towards their identity.

Sara Suleri, in her chapter on *The Satanic Verses*, reads the novel as the inheritor of two colonial traditions. First, there is homoerotic male friendship in the tradition of Kim and the Lama in Kipling's novel, and Aziz and Fielding in *A Passage to India*, a topic implied in the traumatic, embryonic embrace of the falling Saladin and Gibreel that starts the

novel, and repeated in the dream sequences when Gibreel as archangel wrestles with the prophet who is seeking proof of his angelic nature. Secondly, she finds yet another exploration of the religions and nationalisms of the Indian subcontinent superimposed on the struggle between mono- and polytheism in the fantastical city of Jahilia, modelled on the history of Mecca, but the geography of New Delhi.

A polytheistic culture regards the monotheistic, both aware that they are historically doomed to test to the limits the other's apprehension of alterity. The episode of the satanic verses, therefore, serves as a proleptic figure for the seductions of cultural difference that obtain in the Indian subcontinent, and cannot be simply read as a somewhat naive questioning of the integrity of the Islamic ideas (p.201).

Thus Suleri suggests that the 'Submission' episodes ought to be read as going beyond an exploration of the issues at the basis of Islam, and applied to the subcontinental context, and that the erotic undercurrent of possession and rivalry is used in the rendering of Islam into the Submission of the novel. It is in fact hard to imagine that a writer so involved in the pluralities of the Subcontinent, religious or otherwise, would write about any polytheism without having Hinduism, and the question of communalism, in some region of his mind. However, it is hard to see Hinduism as Rushdie had hitherto conceived of it in his fiction in the fickle and commercial religion of the city of Jahilia and the corrupt manipulation of it by its rulers. The Islam of the Mahound chapters, on the other hand, as well as being historically detailed, sits more easily with the rest of Rushdie's fiction, both *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. Especially in the former, in keeping with that novel's reticence in the face of political power, the representation of Islam undergoes a dramatic change when it moves from the suburbs of Delhi to Pakistan, where living under the shadow and sound of a mosque signifies things entirely different. Such is the case in *The Satanic Verses* as well, which asks of its budding religion, 'when

you are weak, do you compromise; when you are strong, are you tolerant?' and finds that the answer is no in both cases, or at least that the tolerance of a ruling religion is selective, a matter of political expediency and public appearances, 'submission' being seen to be achieved, as much as it is of principle.

In such a politicised reading, the point of the rivalry of Allah and Al-Lat, which foregrounds the importance of Al-Lat beyond orthodox history, is not the examination of the nature of mono- and polytheism as such, but the nature of power and monolithic authority: the attraction of a unitary narrative for the oppressed and marginalised, and the tyranny of the same master narrative when combined with power, finding in this structure a paradigm of subcontinental nationalism.

Mahound had been in opposition in Jahilia, the persecuted, if feared, minority, and as yet powerless. Having migrated to Yathrib with his following, his leadership changes character. Obsessed with control and power which were denied him in the shifting, changing world of Jahilia, his reign in exile is dedicated to certainty, the reign of the rulebook, controlling his followers' bodies as well as their spiritual life.¹⁷ Like the exiled Imam in London, Mahound's project in exile becomes one of reversing the flow of time until his restoration to the centre, stopping the clocks, and freezing history and language:

'They love me,' the Imam's voice says... for my habit of smashing clocks. Human beings who turn away from God lose love, and certainty, and also the sense of His boundless time, that encompasses past, present and future; the timeless time, that has no need to move. We long for the eternal, and I am eternity. She is nothing, a tick, or tock. She looks in her mirror everyday and is terrorized by the idea of age, of time passing. Thus she is the prisoner of her own nature; she, too, is in the chains of Time. After the revolution... we shall all be born again, all of us the same unchanging age in the eye of Almighty God (p.214).

The Khomeini-like conception of this Imam does not only serve to illustrate the anti-materialist, anti-history death wish of religious fundamentalism. It is also comparable to a nativist, purist approach to migration. In this extreme incarnation of exile, the banished seeks to remain unadulterated by contact with another culture, attempting to turn back the flow of time, to live, in the imagination, at a fixed past before migration. In the 'soulless country' of the Imam's exile, 'all attempts to put down roots look like treason: they are admissions of defeat' (p.208).

The early Jahilia scenes reflect the romance of a unifying vision that would accord a much needed sense of identity and certainty to its subscribers, who then go on to build a national identity out of this romance. The tone of the Jahilia passages does attest to a level of conformity, at least in sharing the initial seduction, an almost nostalgic one, to Muslim teaching, to the orthodox loving description of the prophet, and the uplifting unifying message that Muslims are taught to believe Mohammed offered to the people of Jahilia, rescuing them from their idolatry (always condemned, anathema for Islam) and shaping them by the force of his message into a powerful, and righteous nation (Jahilia - place of the ignorant - is an orthodox Muslim name for pre-Islamic Mecca). In this, it is certainly possible to see Rushdie's lament for the Muslims of the subcontinent, in Suleri's terms, his 'nostalgia for the unitary, The Islamic, the fatherly' (p.193) and the degree to which he values their, and his own, Muslimness, in writing an allegory for the founding of Pakistan in the historical image of Islam.

To give substance to that most fundamental metaphor of migration in the Indian Subcontinent, the partition, Rushdie turns to older myths that haunt the Muslim

consciousness. If it is now the norm to refer to the partition of India in examinations of Indian migration and diaspora, the trains to Pakistan must have evoked earlier mohajirs for the Muslims of the subcontinent, and given righteousness to their migration. The narrative of Islamic origins is Indianised into 'Submission' already by Gibreel's dreams of Jahilia. The same narrative is further historicised in the Ayesha narrative, which has as its inspiration a news item as much as it does Marquez.¹⁸ The novel's modern day prophetess, Ayesha, makes explicit and implicit use of religious narrative and myth to provide a groundwork of credibility to her pilgrimage: like the original hegira from Mecca to Medina, Ayesha asserts that her pilgrimage will involve a miracle, and give credence to her prophetic claims - the Arabian sea will part, like the Red Sea, to allow the righteous access to their holy land. If we follow the Islamic analogy, the migration - from Mecca to Medina, from Jahilia to Yathrib, from India to Pakistan - is not only the righteous road to salvation, but the road to power, and the nature of such power is always questionable in Rushdie.

The grand historical narrative behind *The Satanic Verses* is the Islamic one, superimposed on the history of Muslim India. Muslim symbols abound, in names and Koranic themes - themes of Haj/travel/migration/partition, as well as revelation/ascendance/rising above figure heavily in the plotline. Names from Islamic history recur in each narrative: Mohammed/ Mahound; Abu Sufyan/Abu Simbel; Hind/Ayesha; Gulistan/Bostan, Mecca and Medina/London and Bombay. It is also arguable that, with its blasphemous approach to religion, the novel attempts to recreate, in secular form, a certain religious ethos, the return and the forgiveness, almost leap of faith, that signify Saladin's salvation at the end of the novel are preempted by the religious parables in Gibreel's dreams.

The imagery of ascendance, of rising above the material world to a transcendent realm, permeates the novel: Alleluia is an obsessive mountaineer, and an obsessive collector of the images of Everest, even a frozen model which she keeps in her freezer, a memento of her last, solo, oxygenless attempt, when she had a near-death experience. The initial fall from the plane crash takes place from a 'Himalayan height' (p.4), introducing a biblical/religious analogy to describe the secular fall of migration, resulting in the worldly duality of nativism and assimilation. Gibreel's luxury highrise in Bombay is boastfully called 'the Everest Villas,' where the heartbroken Rekha Merchant leaps to her death, and Sisodia and Alleluia too die at the end of the novel in a kitsch parody of the fall.

The story of Submission has an ambiguous relationship to worldliness/materialism and the idealism and spiritualism that is at the basis of religion. In Islamic scripture, and in the Mahound version, the prophet's relationship with the location of revelation is constantly repetitive : the prophet climbs up Mount Cone, to the realm of the angels where God's word is revealed to him, and descends again to the shadowy cave of ignorance that is Jahilia, to try and make it conform to the angelic edict. This project is repeated by Gibreel, whose vision of the ideal is a mishmash of his religion, Islam, his nationality, Indianness, and his profession.

The use of such paradoxical imagery, alternating between languages of the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the material characterises the controversial 'dream' chapters of *The Satanic Verses*. Fictionally, they appear in harmony with the novel's surface: having lost his implicit faith in the God of Islam, and unable to fill its place in his deeply idealistic soul, Gibreel is haunted by dreams of the origin of Islam, in which he is a

vacuous messenger, who cannot answer the divine questions that are asked of him. From these blasphemous beginnings, which question the divine origin of Islamic revelation, the dream sequences gradually move towards a restoration of faith, and acceptance of divine revelation, at which point, Gibreel's madness in real life is absolute. Gibreel's insanity is oddly similar to Saleem's delusions of centrality versus marginality in *Midnight's Children*. From tormented dreams of being an ineffectual angel, Gibreel's madness spills into his waking hours as an omnipotent avenger, a transformer, where his main project seems to be the transformation of London (City... I am going to tropicalise you!' (p.354)) into the India of his birth. In Gibreel's case, the Blakean maxim that 'a firm perswasion that a thing is so, makes it so' creates not a poet, but a schizophrenic.

The thought formulated itself in his head without any help from him - between two realities, this world and another that was also right there, visible but unseen... The doctors had been wrong, he now perceived, to treat him for schizophrenia; the splitting was not in him, but in the universe... he rehearsed his opening line - *My name is Gibreel Farishta, and I'm back* - and heard it, so to speak, in stereo, because it, too, belonged in both worlds, with a different meaning in each (p.351, Rushdie's italics).

Filtered through the specificity of Gibreel's consciousness, the dreams are a historicised dramatisation of Islam. His peculiar position as a Muslim Indian actor who has achieved god-like status impersonating Hindu gods, his cinematic vision and terminology, his sporadic self-education in theories of transcendence, his sensual nature and the guilt that he has caused Rekha Merchant's suicide, the conflicts of his budding relationship with Alleluia Cone, his awareness of being an out-of-place Indian in England, his increasing knowledge of otherness, of the language of orientalism, all permeate Gibreel's retrospective look at the origins of Islam, in half-conscious, half-articulated ways. Hovering between a materialist critique of religion and the wish to once more belong to

its transcendental, all-explaining certainty, Gibreel casts himself in the role of his angelic namesake, and tries to redefine his role in the system of belief.

Gibreel dreams, that having been offered a compromise deal by the Grandee (acceptance of the three goddesses, Lat, Uzza and Manat, as worthy of worship, in return for Mahound's election to the council of Jahilia, giving him a share of power, a wider base of converts) Mahound has to climb Mount Cone, the fictionalised Mount Hira of Mecca, and ask Gibreel the archangel for Allah's revelation on the subject.

Gibreel's telling of the story at this stage is, above all, cinematic: his point of view alters between 'that of the camera and at other moments, spectator,' and as such, is always shifting: creating different shots where he is 'floating on a high crane looking at the foreshortened figures of the actors, or he is swooping down to stand invisibly between them... with the help of a hand-held steadicam.' As a spectator, 'he sits up on Mount Cone like a paying customer in the dress circle, and Jahilia is his silver screen' (p.108). Then alarmingly, the spectator discovers that he is in fact actor, even character in the movie:

And then, without warning, Hamza says to Mahound: 'Go ask Gibreel,' and he, the dreamer, feels his heart leaping in alarm, who, me? *I'm* supposed to know the answers here? I'm sitting here watching this picture and now this actor points his finger out at me, who ever heard the like, who asks the bloody audience of a 'theological' to solve the plot? - But as the dream shifts, it's always changing form, he, Gibreel, is no longer a mere spectator, but the central player, the star. With his old weakness for taking too many roles: yes, yes, he's not just playing the archangel but also him, the businessman, the Messenger, Mahound, coming up the mountain when he comes (p.108).

Gibreel's double role involves him 'above-looking-down and below-staring-up' (p.111), but however ambiguous the logistics of the revelation might be, the assumed presence

of God is absent from the equation, deserting the panicking Gibreel, who does not know his lines, and is afraid to speak in case he seems a fool, in his hour of need. Despite the 'non-appearance... of the One who is supposed to have the answers' (p.111), the revelation that Mahound was in search of takes place:

The dragging again the dragging and now the miracle starts in his my our guts, [Mahound] is straining with all his might at something, forcing something, and Gibreel begins to feel the strength of that force, here it is *at my own jaw* working it, opening shutting; and the power, starting within Mahound, reaching up to *my vocal cords* and the voice comes... My lips moving, being moved by. What, whom? Don't know, can't say. Nevertheless, here they are...: the Words.

Being God's postman is no fun, yaar.

Butbutbut: God isn't in this picture.

God knows whose postman I've been (p.112).

Mahound's flirtation with compromise is short-lived, compromise being a negation of what he had previously stood for. The acceptance of the three 'exalted birds' (p.114) whose intercession is desired, provides Mahound with an entry to the 'poetry tent' (p.113) - for this is Jahilia on the day of the annual poetry competition - where he creates a sensation, but the 'night of the desolating triumph of the businessman' (p.115) brings chaos, and the original followers of the prophet are ambushed and brawl to the death with the brothers of Hind, Abu Simbel's wife, Mahound's adversary. A confrontation with Hind, who looks down on Mahound's compromise, sends the prophet up Mount Cone again, to rediscover the kind of idea he had been:

I am your equal... and also your opposite... If you are for Allah, I am for Al-Lat. And she doesn't believe in your God when he recognizes her. Her opposition to him is implacable, irrevocable, engulfing. The war between us cannot end in truce... Between Allah and the Three there can be no peace. I don't want it. I want the fight. To the death; that is the kind of idea I am. What kind are you? (p.121).

Once again, in the moment of revelation, Mahound wrestles Gibreel in the cave, and interprets his loss of the fight as a sign of the genuineness of the new verses: 'it's only devils who get beaten in such circs' (p.123). Whereas it is Gibreel's contention that the prophet threw the fight, and that his prophecy looks suspiciously like fraud, a confidence trick: 'it's what he wanted, it was his will filling me up and giving me strength to hold him down' (p.123). Thus Mahound separates and externalises the sources of the two revelations as good and evil, the angel of God and the Devil, and finds in the episode a testing, and a renewal of his faith, whereas for Gibreel, 'hovering-watching from his highest camera angle... just one tiny thing that's a bit of a problem here, namely that *it was me both times, baba, me first and second also me*. From my mouth, both the statement and the repudiation, verses and converses, universes and reverses, the whole thing, and we all know how my mouth got worked' (p.123). However, when his schizophrenia flares up, Gibreel too, like his prophet, externalises the sources of good and evil, eradicates ambiguity, and identifies satanic adversaries in the guises of women, and of Saladin, his other, his conjoined opposite.

It is, however, possible to read the Submission episode not simply as a functional device dramatising the haunting of the lapsed Gibreel, but more or less independently, as a historicised account of Islam, 'in part, a secular man's reckoning with the religious spirit.'¹⁹ Numerous anecdotes that have a familiar currency in Islam are recounted in the novel, and have their assumed orthodox significance reversed in favour of historicised doubt, where originally they had been used to illustrate divine certainty. The now famous incident of the Satanic Verses in Islamic history makes metaphorical sense, and illustrates the conflict between a materialist and an idealist reading. The existence of the controversy in history is by no means agreed by orthodoxy or by historians - but where

it is accepted, the fact of the restoration of the authenticated channel of inspiration - Allah through Gibreel - is emphasised, while a doubting Gibreel is shocked by the indeterminacy that had allowed the original version, later to be labelled 'Satanic,' to get through at all.

In the two episodes that direct such fundamental questioning to the origin of Koranic revelation - the Satanic verses, and Salman the scribe's blasphemous alteration of Mahound's recitation - it is the very act of pitting words of other sources beside Godly ones that is labelled 'satanic,' echoing the fallen angels' rebellious dissent/challenge to the word and authority of God. The original satanic act of the blasphemers and apostates is their dissent from God-given explanation, registering their own narratives. It is thus the act of dissent that is Satanic, and not the source of that act.

In another hadith-based episode Ayesha, the prophet's youngest wife, is disgruntled that 'her husband wanted so many other women' and is unappeased by his explanations of 'political alliances and so on.' 'Finally he went into - what else? - one of his trances, and out he came with a message from the archangel. Gibreel had recited verses giving him full divine support. God's permission to fuck as many women as he liked. So there: what could poor Ayesha say against the verses of God?... This: 'Your God certainly jumps to it when you need him to fix things up for you.' Salman's account after apostasy, 'recounting the rumour as if it were incontrovertible fact' (p.386), highlights his doubts as to the source of the verses, and paves the way for his apostasy. The vulgarisation of the incident is one of the passages that attracted most attention and caused most anger after publication: the orthodox version of the story has the young Ayesha, famous for her sharp wit and articulate tongue, saying something very similar, but it is piously

interpreted as praise, proof of the cherished position of the prophet of Islam in the eyes of Islam's God.

The Jahilia chapters *are* close to the orthodox taught version, in plot as well as, at least on occasion, emotion, not surprisingly, since their dreamer is a Muslim, who has had a traditional, if informal, Muslim upbringing, much like the writer of the novel. The issues of doubt raised, and the channels of blasphemy followed are also familiar, from the more learned - the Satanic verses incident, the falsification of the transcripts by a blaspheming scribe - to the more vulgar - the prophet's professed sexual appetite in a culture caught between puritanism and sensuality. The blasphemous notions that the dream sequences throw at the body of Islam are variously scholarly and populist, but with the exception of the naming of the prophet 'Mahound,' Islamic, which, despite its immaculate textual justification, sits uncomfortably in such a Muslim fabrication of Islamic history.

It is important to point out that the contentious passages in *The Satanic Verses*, including the title incident itself, were recorded by Muslim historians, and contain questions as old as the religion, that the religion has directed against itself. It is therefore noteworthy that it was the one and the same culture and mentality that created the religious system and its most fundamental questioning, significantly in the figures of a fallible/fraudulent prophet and a devotee-turned-apostate.^{20 21}

The narrative asks us to trust in the sincerity of Mohammed's belief in his own divine status, making the reader privy to his anxious existentialist interior monologues, his self-questioning. The account of his reign in Medina, on the other hand, is the reported

speech of an apostate, Salman Farsi, in his revelations to Baal the satirist, now an aging figure of fun writing vague, uncertain verses.

The figure of the apostate, Salman the Persian in the novel, is a slight alteration of history, in a way that brings the migrant, the scribe and the blasphemer into one representation, and winks in the direction of the author. The Salman Farsi of history was in fact an immigrant, a Persian whose presence as one of the first devotees, and an early Sufi mystic, is close to Iran's heart, in a way which would make his depiction as a blasphemer not very endearing to that government. The story of Salman's apostasy is transferred from Abdullah Ibn Saad, who converted to Islam, became a scribe, but then became an apostate, and is reputed to have spread rumours among the believers about his falsification of the revelations.

In Salman's blaspheming narrative, Mahound's rule in Yathrib becomes more and more materialist, even bodily in its crudest sense, obsessive about rules and laws from cleanliness to trade, which the prophet 'laid down... and the angel would confirm it afterwards; so I began to get a fishy smell in my nose' (p.365). As the scribe starts 'wondering what manner of God this was that sounded so much like a businessman' (p.364), he devises the famous test of the truth of Mahound's prophetic nature, by slowly falsifying the revelations, and finding confirmation of his doubts when the prophet does not notice:

So there I was, actually writing the Book, or rewriting, anyway, polluting the word of God with my own profane language. But, good heavens, if my poor words could not be distinguished from the Revelation by God's own Messenger, then what did that mean? What did that say about the quality of divine poetry?... After that I knew my days in Yathrib were

numbered; but I had to go on doing it. I had to. There is no bitterness like that of a man who finds out he has been believing in a ghost (p.367-8).

Like Abdallah ibn Saad, who was forgiven after Mohammed's conquest of Mecca, and is reported to have returned to the fold of the faithful, Salman the Persian finds mercy after Mahound's return to Jahilia, despite initial misgivings: 'Your blasphemy, Salman, can't be forgiven. Did you think I wouldn't figure it out? To set your words against the Words of God' (p.374). It is important, however, to note that Salman's blaspheming revision of the alleged word of God is at least in part, done for love, in the hope that the prophet will notice his alterations, prove that his messenger-status is genuine, and restore Salman's faith: 'But when I read him the chapter, he nodded politely, and I went out of his tent with tears in my eyes' (p.368).

This is powerful stuff, attacking the two unchallengeable bedrocks of Islam: that the Koran is the perfect word of God, and that the deliverer of the Word, Mohammed, is invincible. Mohammed's teaching is explicit in asking believers to regard him as an ordinary mortal, a mere messenger, a vessel used to carry God's word. On paper, the distinction between Christ and Christian, and Mohammed and Muslims, is clear-cut: Mohammed unlike Christ is not Godly, but a mere mortal, and as such is not to be worshipped. Yet in reality, now as well as in history, the prophet of Islam did inspire and enjoy absolute devotion, and through the system of the Hadith, he was established as the figure of the ideal Muslim, the perfect man, who was not only to be admired, but his perfection in daily life to be copied and venerated as tenets of the new religion as well.

Islam, in fact, has two messengers, one angelic, one human. It rests on a solid certainty that the Koran *is* the unadulterated, 'uncreated' (unlike the New Testament) word of God,

in what must seem, to any non-believer, a highly elaborate system of relaying through the angel Gibreel, to the illiterate Mohammed, who then had to relay it, ventriloquise it, verbatim, to a scribe. The unassailable incorruptibility of all the steps, therefore, must be a matter of unquestioning belief. Mohammed's good character and his unerring judgment are essential to the basic structure of Islam - the religion prides itself on its holy book, and a fallible reciter would throw doubt on the integrity of his recitation. Thus, questioning of the word of the Book, or the prophet's authority, is synonymous with challenging the foundations of the religion itself. Paradoxically, the Koran proclaims itself as the supreme work of poetry - having God as its author - and as proof of this divine status, challenges earthly poets to equal its majesty, if they can. Yet at the same time, attempting to meet such challenge is decreed blasphemous.²²

The tone of wistfulness that characterises Salman's blasphemy pervades the Ayesha chapters as well, where the doubting figure of Mirza Saeed derives the energy for his dissent partly from his guilty attraction to the source of revelation, an attraction he finally gives in to, finding belief at the moment of his death. Gibreel finds this new dream a relief, 'because at least it suggests that the deity whom he, Gibreel, has tried unsuccessfully to kill can be a God of love, as well as one of vengeance, power, duty, rules and hate; and it is, too, a nostalgic sort of tale, of a lost homeland' (p.216).

The blasphemies of this religious parable are more immediate and more politicised. The Ayesha version of the pilgrimage does not only feminise the origin of a religion, it sexualises, vulgarises, Indianises, and altogether historicises it, and brings it to the centre of contemporary history. Following the line of argument that makes of a female body the

symbolic site of conflicting desire, this narrative gives flesh to some of the undercurrents of the Mahound chapter, what Suleri calls 'the powerful erotics of Faith' (p.202).

Ayesha's body is an object of desire to Mirza Saeed Akhtar, who is the voice of dissent and doubt in this narrative. His questioning of the peasant seeress's death-wishing vision of pilgrimage, masquerading as faith healing, is expressed in a voice that is urban, cosmopolitan, secular, as well as guiltily lustful, corruptly materialist, and hypocritical - he had been the one insisting that his westernised wife wear the purdah while they were in their mansion in the village of Titlipur, pretending that this would add spice to their sex life, when the real reason had been his obsession with sexual purity, after the discovery of his mid-life lust for the underage, epileptic Ayesha. Having lost his cancer-stricken wife Mishal to the new-found faith of the young seeress, Mirza follows them, absurdly, in his air-conditioned Mercedes, with an ice-box full of coke, and a line of doubt that his wife labels 'imported European atheism.' 'Heaven and Hell, Mishal? The Devil with a pointy tail and cloven hoofs? How far are you going with this? Do women have souls, what do you say? Or the other way: do souls have gender? Is God black or white? When the waters of the ocean part, where will the extra waters go?' (p.239).

The homoeroticism of Mahound's fight with Gibreel for supremacy in the cave of divine revelation is subtle. In the Ayesha chapters, this is vulgarised, in a combination, one can imagine, of the sort of coverage the real event must have had, and the masturbatory tone of popular cinema: Ayesha 'stretche[s] out... nude' (p.226) beside the 'inert' Gibreel 'under a tree, or a ditch' (p.234) to get the divine message - 'What do you think this is, some kind of wet dream or what? Damn me if I know from where this girl was getting her information/inspiration. Not from this quarter, that's for sure' (p.226). The message -

mainly that the villagers are commanded to make a pilgrimage to Mecca Sharif, on foot, including a walk across the ocean floor from Bombay, through the parting waters of the Arabian Sea - is passed down to Ayesha not in the intricate loveliness and originality of the Koran, but sung in 'clear and memorable forms' (p.497) to the tunes of popular hits and Hindi film songs.

The ending of the Ayesha pilgrimage is enigmatic, and perhaps conciliatory. This is, after all, the most-cited passage from the novel when defending it from the charge that it is anti-religious - there is at least one occasion where conflict is resolved through religious resolution. The Ayesha pilgrimage, like its real-life counterpart, ends with the drowning of the would-be pilgrims, but the account of the newspapers and police reports are questioned by one of the surviving pilgrims, Sarpanch Mohammad: 'Just when my strength failed and I thought I would surely die there in the water, I saw it with my own eyes; I saw the sea divide, like hair being combed; and they were all there, far away, walking away from me' (p.504). Mirza Saeed returns to Titlipur, and at the moment of his death, has a similar experience:

'Open,' she said. He closed. He was a fortress with clanging gates. - He was drowning... Then something within him refused that, made a different choice, and the instant his heart broke, he opened. His body split apart from his adam's-apple to his groin, so that she could reach deep within him, and now she was open, they all were, and at the moment of their opening the waters parted, and they all walked to Mecca across the bed of the Arabian Sea (p.507).

The languages of death and acceptance, of coming back to the fold, returning, at the moment where the point of return disappears, converge, and give this resolution a wishful sentimentality that is then echoed at the two other endings, of the Brickhall

scenes in London, and the healing of Saladin's split from his father and native country, in Bombay.

If one argues that *The Satanic Verses* is a novel with a religious cum blasphemous spirit, and defines blasphemy, in a secular and postcolonial world, as a semi-devoted return to the religion of an origin left behind, it is possible to read the novel's inscriptions and repetitions of the stories of reunion and renewed love at moments of death in a religious sense of seeking forgiveness and redemption, even in the secular/postcolonial contexts of some of its narratives.

The immigrant community of Brickhall is portrayed as a troubled and conflicted one, a community to whom change comes in violent ways. The Shandaar hotel and cafe, its inhabitants, and the family who owns it, encapsulate the conflicts of, among others, the young and the old, the semi-assimilated and the rigidly loyal to tradition and native, rooted past, reflected in the disgrace and banishment of the older daughter, Mishal, after her affair with Hanif Johnson. The death of her parents in the apocalyptic fire that burns down the Shandaar cafe puts an end to Mishal's conflict with her background, and frees her, phoenix-from-the-ashes, to take her own life decisions, getting a job, restoring the hotel, and marrying Hanif. Mishal's wedding, and her reconciliation with her younger sister are the last scenes of the Brickhall chapters, and the closest that *The Satanic Verses* comes to a hopeful celebration of the semi-assimilated immigrant. But by implication, Mishal's freedom to enjoy the plural hybrid vibrancy of her immigrant identity is conditional on her orphaning, on the death of the parents who were linking her to the puritanical repressiveness of the dream-Submission. Her newness and hybridity are only possible when she is separated from the Bangladeshiness of her parents, the Caliban

nativist/Muslimness of her mother, and the Ariel learnedness and humanism of her father, whose intellect had been inapplicable, lost in the metropolis that marginalised him. By contrast, Mishal and Hanif have to turn away from 'make-believe' and believe that 'the world is real. We have to live in it; we have to live here, to live on' (p.469).

In the Bombay scenes that end Saladin's travels, languages of homecoming and leavetaking similarly converge. Saladin returns to his roots in Bombay, in the first of his two trips back in the novel, only to chop them down. After years of estrangement, he visits his father, and finds him an aging, but still charismatic and powerful presence, and his quest for forgiveness ends disastrously: 'what Saladin Chamcha had come to India for: forgiveness. That was his business in his old home town. But whether to give or to receive, he was not able to say' (p.640). The walnut-tree of childhood that had been planted in the father's garden to celebrate his birth, is felled, and turned to cash.

His second return, however, is an urgent one to his father's deathbed, where their traditional roles are reversed, and in a narrative of emotional intensity, Saladin becomes his dying father's carer:

To fall in love with one's father after the long angry decades was a serene and beautiful feeling; a renewing, life-giving thing, Saladin wanted to say, but did not, because it sounded vampirish; as if by sucking this new life out of his father he was making room, in Changez's body, for death. Although he kept it quiet, however, Saladin felt hourly closer to many old, rejected selves, many alternative Saladins - or rather Salahuddins - which had split off from himself as he made his various life choices, but which had apparently continued to exist (p.523).

Saladin's return, forgiveness and renewal, like Mirza Akhtar's, like Mishal Sufyan's, is conditional on death, the death of the old, to enable the birth of the new, in the novel's

final acceptance of Lucretius over Ovid. Saladin is obliged to live, in his own words, 'an orphaned life, like Mohammad's; like everyone else's' (p.534). The image of growing up is a leitmotif in the novel, attempting to inscribe a model where the parent ceases to 'explain' the child, who then has to forge an identity caught between the nostalgia of an authoritarian, but comforting past, and the guilt, the blasphemy of leavetaking, the denial of roots, familial, national, cultural and religious.

The last paragraphs of *The Satanic Verses* are rich in literary detail: Srinivas Aravamudan finds Blakean allusions and an innocuous reaffirmation of the satanic in Saladin's exclamation 'to the devil with it!'; there is a touch of Forster, and Nirad Chaudri - to whom Saladin compares himself at one point - in the turning away from the window that overlooks the view to the Arabian Sea, where one might embark on a passage to England; and a reference to Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, a novel to whose exploration of the origins of Christianity, and parallels between the satanic, the schizophrenic and the poetic, *The Satanic Verses* owes a great debt of inspiration.²³ Looking at the moonlight 'stretching from the rocks of Scandal Point out to the far horizon,' Saladin refuses to follow 'the illusion of a silver pathway, like a parting in the water's shining hair, like a road to miraculous lands. He shook his head; he could no longer believe in fairy tales. Childhood was over' (pp.546-47). At the end of Bulgakov's novel, the poet, his lover and his characters leave the city of Moscow, 'with its onion-domed monasteries, fragmented sunlight reflected in its windows,' and either follow the 'long-awaited path of moonlight' or travel to an 'everlasting home' in the dawn, where 'the master's memory, his accursed, needling memory began to fade. He had been freed, just as he had set free the character he had created' (pp.430-32). The writer of *The Satanic Verses* and his characters, however, choose to stay in the world of memory and history,

in the corporeal city of Bombay. Saladin, we assume, again at Zeeny's urging, will 'try and make an adult acquaintance with this place, this time. Try and embrace this city, as it is, not some childhood memory that makes you both nostalgic and sick... The actually existing place. Make its faults your own. Become its creature; belong' (p.541). In a changing world, it is the Ariel figure of Saladin who survives, by going 'native' only far enough to acknowledge origins, and using his talents of regeneration and adaptability, to survive in an 'orphaned' state. Gibreel/Caliban, unable to adapt to a world in which 'somebody went and changed the rules' (p.189), is destroyed.

The ending of *The Satanic Verses* in Bombay presents a problem: on the one hand, Saladin's return to India and into the arms of an Indian lover indicates that the fact of post-colonial migration is not confined to the metropolitan West, but is relevant to modern India. When Saladin decides to reclaim his citizenship, and become that elusive being, 'a good Indian,' his migration is not cancelled by this return, but repeated, brought home. This falls in with Rushdie's earlier variations around the theme of migration, in *Midnight's Children* and *Shame*. On the other hand, it also throws doubt on the value of basing this particular novel in the metropolitan centre of migration.

It has to be seen in an ironic light that in Salman Rushdie's novel, in which he finally tackles immigration directly, both main protagonists of the novel, two Indian men who had migrated to London, end up going back, having cut their ties with their English sojourn. Borrowing his own vocabulary from the text, Rushdie's immigrant novel is still more concerned with the question of how to be 'a good Indian,' than it is with issues of actual migrancy. The drama might be acted out in London, but the origin and the final

destination, the emotional centre of the characters and the book, is still India, though it might be viewed from metropolitan London.

It is worth asking whether, in *The Satanic Verses*, London, its migrant community, its politics, act as much more than a backdrop to the rival transformations of the two postcolonials, Saladin and Gibreel, the only two characters explored in any depth in the novel, their status as migrants seen as and explored in much more complex detail than any member of the fictional community of Brickhall. The notions of migrancy and newness that Rushdie is advocating in the novel, seem to be more workable in the relative homeliness of Bombay, in the wise and comforting arms of Zeenat Vakil, than in the incompatibilities and the demonstrated power struggles of London. Saladin is more alienated in the migrant margin of the metropolis, than he is at the metropolitan elite of Bombay. This model at the end of the day is akin to the one originally implied in *Midnight's Children*, of the immigrant writer looking back, with ambivalent authority, on his history, adding to the by now familiar metaphor of migration, the new metaphor of blasphemy.

Rushdie's Muslim secularism is not the liberal option of polite respect which at its heart would have distance and self-imposed ignorance. In order to fashion a specifically muslim consciousness, Rushdie turns his attention to manifestations as well as the history and scripture of Islam and has no choice but to articulate the lack of belief that is integral to his secularism, in blasphemous terms. It thus has a paradoxical spirit: going into the history of Islam in meticulous and sometimes loving detail, in a curious mixture of orthodox emotion and vulgar mocking, it blasphemes and shows devotion at the same time. In cultural terms, this makes the writer a better Muslim, while the same

engagement is read by the orthodox as blasphemy, interpreted in its traditional meaning as destructive insult.

Among all the images of authorship in the novel, the figures of Baal the satirist and Salman the scribe combine to create the most accurate representation of the author of this embattled novel. *The Satanic Verses* does not offer a clear moral position for its writer, in the ways that *Shame*, and to a certain extent, *Midnight's Children* had articulated. The ambiguous authorial/Godly function is often implied in the text to be fraudulent, or an absence, to be reinscribed by a reader's will: this was in fact done by a divided readership in uncontrollable variety. Gayatri Spivak, in her Barthesian reading, drawing on notions of the death of the author, claims that 'in the Rushdie affair, it is the late Ayatollah who can be seen as filling the author-function, and Salman Rushdie, himself, caught in a different cultural logic, is no more than the writer-as-performer.'²⁴ The artist's (the writer's, the immigrant intellectual's) position in *The Satanic Verses* is variously framed in comic, ironic, self-deprecating voices and situations. Such ambiguity and subtlety of inflection were not allowed to the self of the writer after the novel's publication, when the 'myopic scrivener' of the text was transformed to a scheming manipulator who had, if not an involvement in an actual conspiracy, certainly had a hidden agenda. In the fundamentalist reading of the fatwa and its followers, Rushdie is Baal in his worst incarnation, vilifying a religion for profit, or as part of an international Muslim-hating conspiracy.²⁵ In the definitions of the novel, this author, with his challenge to authorised versions of truth, and to institutionalised authority, is more Salman Farsi than Baal, and the charge of blasphemy invokes a political logic which would deny Rushdie's very right to represent Islam and Muslims in descriptions that differ from and therefore affront the orthodoxy.

Tariq Modood argues that the issue behind *The Satanic Verses* Affair is one that is central to the future of community relations in Britain: 'The issue is of the rights of non-European religious and cultural minorities in the context of a secular hegemony.'²⁶ Rushdie's novel faces the problem of how to represent the conceptual possibility of a vital coexistence of an immigrant community with diverse elements of religiousness, activism and nativist traditionalism inside this particular Western society. His narrative way out is to use an author-figure who declares that 'the issue will not be resolved here,' but it might, presumably, wishfully, in the real world.

The novel itself is conscious of the existence of 'incompatible realities' (p.314). Alleluia's father, Otto Cone, warns his daughter against the idea of 'continuum':

Anybody tries to tell you how this most beautiful and most evil of planets is somehow homogeneous, composed of reconcilable elements, that it all *adds up*, you get on the phone to the straitjacket tailor... The world is incompatible, just never forget it: gaga (p.295).

The oppositional realities of the novel, however, seem to find a resolution, through imagery of death and rebirth, and a religious notion of forgiveness. The notion of wishful thinking has a substantial place in the novel, particularly in the interpretation of religion, such as the Ayesha pilgrimage. But it is not confined to religion - Saladin inherits the magic lamp that his father had taunted him with in his childhood. Rigorous rubbing of the lamp does not save either protagonist, but if the identification between the two Salmans is as strong as it seems, rubbing his magic lamp, the writer of *The Satanic Verses* might be living in the hope that his version of blasphemy was not ultimately unforgivable.

NOTES

1. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking/ Penguin, 1988). Further references are in the text.
2. Shabbir Akhtar, *Be Careful with Mohammad! The Salman Rushdie Affair* (London: Bellow, 1989).
3. Homi Bhabha, 'How Newness Enters the World,' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 212-35. Further references are in the text.
4. Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (London: Picador, 1982), and *Shame* (London: Picador, 1984). Further references are in the text.
5. Sara Suleri, *The Rhetoric of English India* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp.175-219 (p.174). Further references are in the text.
6. Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands,' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.9-21 (p.10). Further references are in the text.
7. Shabbir Akhtar, 'Rushdie's Good Faith: a Muslim Response,' *The Independent*, 5 February 1990, p.19.
8. Salman Rushdie, 'Between God and Devil,' *The Bookseller* 4345 (31 March 1989), pp.1151-6.
9. William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp.xxi.
10. Pierre François, 'Salman Rushdie's Philosophical Materialism in *The Satanic Verses*,' in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. M.D. Fletcher (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1994), pp.305-19. Further references are in the text.
11. Srinivas Aravamudan, '"Being God's Postman is No Fun, Yaar": Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*,' in *Reading Rushdie: Perspectives on the Fiction of Salman Rushdie*, ed. M.D. Fletcher (Amsterdam-Atlanta: Rodopi B.V., 1994), pp.187-208 (p.191). Further references are in the text.
12. This song seems to have a consolidated place in the fiction of the Indian diaspora: It has a fleeting mention in *Midnight's Children* and in 'Imaginary Homelands,' and the filmmaker Mira Nair used it in *Mississippi Massala*, where the Indian family, forced out of Uganda by Idi Amin's regime, listen to it on tape on the bus on their way to the airport.
13. Gibreel's surname echoes the 'Surah Al-Najm' (Surah of the Star, The Koran, Surah 53), the location of the alleged Satanic verses.
14. The classic novel on this theme is probably the Sudanese author Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*, trans. by Denys Johnson-Davies (Washington: Three Continents Press, 1985). The blurb on the back cover of the 1985 edition quotes this dramatic review from *The Observer*: 'An Arabian Nights in reverse, enclosing a pithy

moral about international misconceptions and delusions. The brilliant student of an earlier generation returns to his Sudanese village; obsession with the mysterious West and a desire to bite the hand that has half-fed him, has led him to London and the beds of women with similar obsessions about the mysterious East. He kills them at the point of ecstasy and the Occident, in its turn, destroys him.'

15. Salman Rushdie, 'Is Nothing Sacred?' in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), pp.415-29 (p.422).

16. Hanif Kureishi, *The Buddha of Suburbia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991).

17. In a historicised reading of the Koran (which the word of the book and the religion does not encourage) there is a marked difference between the surah written in Mecca, and those written after the hegira, in Medina. The emphasis shifts from spiritual pronouncements that define the religion and its universalist claims, to the introduction of the detailed legal structure of Islamic law, covering all aspects of community life. Akeel Bilgrami, in his essay 'What is a Muslim' draws attention to this duality, and argues that Islamic reform could be possible only after such a historicised reading, and the acceptance that the legal system postulated in the Koran is not universal and unchangeable, but on the contrary, 'intended to address a very specific historical context in which conversion was paramount in the concerns of the prophet.' (Akeel Bilgrami, 'What is a Muslim? Fundamental Commitment and Cultural Identity,' *Critical Inquiry* 18 (Summer 1992), pp.821-43 (p.827).

18. The Hawkes Bay case, Pakistan, February 1983. A young Shia woman, Naseem Fatema, who claimed that she was receiving revelations from the twelfth Imam, led thirty-eight people on an attempted pilgrimage to Karbala (the site of an important Shia-Sunni battle, after the death of the prophet Mohammed), by walking through the Arabian Sea, which, she prophesied, would part to let them walk through. Most of the pilgrims were drowned, the rest were arrested by Pakistani police for attempting illegal migration. Hanif Kureishi writes about this incident, which took place during his very first visit to Pakistan. ('The Rainbow Sign,' in *My Beautiful Launderette and the Rainbow Sign* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p.20. In Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* trans. by Gregory Rabassa (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), a teenage idiot-savante feeds on butterflies and drives men to suicide with her unearthly beauty.

19. Salman Rushdie, 'In Good Faith,' in *Imaginary Homelands*, pp.393-414 (p.396).

20. In the mysticism of Islam, the Sufi, devotion and blasphemy go hand in hand. The basis of Sufism is an identification with God by going through processes of purification, usually represented in literature as a pilgrimage, or a quest. Rushdie notably used a twelfth century Persian poem, a Sufi classic, *The Conference of the Birds* (Farid al-Din Attar, trans. by Afkham Darabandi and Dick Davis (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984)), as a model for his first novel, *Grimus*. In the poem, thirty birds go on a pilgrimage, across allegorical landscape, and up a mountain, to find god, called Simurg. When they get there, they realize that they have become god - Si-Murg translates as 'thirty birds.' (As explained by Rushdie in an interview with John Haffenden ed., in *Novelists in Interview* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp.231-61) Some Sufi mystics in history, having reached the end of their purification, and declared themselves to be God, were executed for blasphemy. The Sufi influence, and its confluence of devotion and blasphemy, and

insistence on themes of quest, is implied in *The Satanic Verses*.

21. This narrative is not necessarily exclusive to Islam. For instance, *Crime and Punishment* (London: Penguin, 1991), a novel structured to echo the patterns of the Christian narrative of redemption, uses the figure of a transgressor/ blasphemer to test and reaffirm the system of belief. 'Raskol' and Raskolnik' translate as 'schism' and 'religious dissenter' from Russian. At one stage, Porfiry Petrovich, the police inspector, tells Raskolnikov the story of a 'sectarian' with a rebellious artistic temperament, asking, 'And did you know that he's a Raskolnik?' (p.526), drawing attention to an implied parallel between the two outsiders.

22. Washington Irving, *Life of Mahomet* (J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.: London, 1911) paraphrases: 'What greater miracle could they have than the Koran itself; a book revealed by means of an unlettered man; so elevated in language, so incontrovertible in argument, that the united skill of men and devils could compose nothing comparable. What greater proof could there be that it came from none but God himself? The Koran itself is a miracle.'

23. Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita* (London: Harvill, 1995). Further references are in the text.

24. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Reading the Satanic Verses,' in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp.217-41 (pp.218-9).

25. Ayatollah Khomeini broadcast the fatwa that cast a certain reading of *The Satanic Verses* in stone, and condemned Rushdie to years in hiding, on 14 February 1989: 'I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of *The Satanic Verses* book which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Koran, and all involved in its publication who were aware of the content, are sentenced to death.' (As quoted in *The Rushdie Letters: Freedom to Speak, Freedom to Write*, Steve MacDonogh, eds., in association with Article 19 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), p.130.)

26. Tariq Modood, 'British Asian Muslims and the Rushdie Affair,' *Political Quarterly* 61 (April/ June 1990), pp.143-60 (p.160).

CONCLUSION

In his 1994 essay titled 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,' Arif Dirlik discusses the junctures of postcolonial and postmodern modes of literary and critical production, and the stresses attendant on both. In his argument, the postcolonial, contrary to common perception, is not 'a description of anything,' but 'a discourse that seeks to constitute the world in the self-image of intellectuals who view themselves... as postcolonial intellectuals' and thus 'postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power.'¹ This somewhat accusatory reformulation of the ambivalent position occupied by the postcolonial intellectual would seem to be confirmed by contemporary fiction that attempts to produce representations of migration, and its self-conscious attempts to address and define postcolonial authorship in relation to postcolonial and migrant self-definition. In the definitions of Said, Rushdie, Mukherjee and Nayantara Sahgal among others, the migrant postcolonial writer's vision is alternately contrapuntal, partial, nostalgic, guilty, chameleonic, stereoscopic, schizophrenic, fragmented, fluid, decolonising, orientalisising, ambivalent and engaged, defensive and strident, complicit yet emancipatory, international yet tied down by, as well as gesturing allegiance towards, regional and national identity and history. The newly confident voice of Indian writing in English signalled by the prestigious place that diaspora writing occupies after *Midnight's Children* belies the very real sense of nervousness about authority that is implied by such conflicting terms of self-positioning, and repeatedly constitutes the subtext of the works studied in this thesis.

Such nervousness, in fact, is frequently advertised as an integral part of the stance of the postcolonial critic and author alike. The introduction to this thesis attempts to discuss the complications of postcolonial self-positioning by looking at the strategies that Edward Said employs to locate his voice, and the reactions that these invite. Said showcases the shifting ground he functions on by subtle means, highlighting the difficult negotiation that an exile is obliged to hold between homelessness and worldliness, nationalism and cosmopolitanism. These shifts and uncertainties are interpreted by Aijaz Ahmad as inconsistency, almost a weakness of allegiance in his critical work that Said is, as 'a Palestinian,' able to offer much more committedly in his more overtly political writing. Abdul JanMohamed, on the other hand, commends Said for the use of his 'interstitial cultural space as a vantage point,' from which complicated 'crossings and recrossings of cultural borders' can be undertaken, with the broad intention of decolonisation, perhaps, but never from a simply definable subject position. It is possible to read the tensions of authorship in the fiction of migration in terms of such conflict. This difficulty of self-positioning inevitably gives rise to questions of legitimacy of representation: Are these representations of migration instances of resistance, or has the power of representation been handed down from Orientalists to postcolonial intellectuals, as Arif Dirlik seems to suggest? What is the position that the postcolonial, particularly migrant writer is speaking from, what is the relationship of their representation with the represented on the one hand, and on the predominantly Western readership on the other?

This role has been described, in different contexts, by writers and critics such as Rushdie, Mukherjee and Homi Bhabha as that of a cultural translator, of middle-man and mediator, with various degrees of ambivalence. It is interesting, in this context, to

look at the concept of mediation, appearing in its most notorious instance, in Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education*:

[The British must] do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.²

The application of this idea of the creation of a class of mediators has given rise to a class of Indians at once dominant and derided - these are the native-aliens, that Uma Parameswaran, among others, criticises for their lamentable degree of alienation from 'native traditions,' their Ariel-like emulation and mimicry of the colonialists, in contrast with a reinterpretation of Caliban's role of native subjecthood, both in terms of a loyalty to native identity, and in terms of active resistance. Native-aliens, the supposed mediators, on the other hand, are condemned in their servility and complicity with power: mediation not as a benign act of facilitating understanding, but as a project of exploitation and oppression. It is notable that loyalty as opposed to complicity is here seen as intrinsically connected to authenticity versus mimicry and change. What do these terms signify now, in a postcolonial context, especially a migrant one, where aspiring expatriate writers stand accused of being mimic-men and native-aliens under a new guise. But a postcolonial critic such as Homi Bhabha is still experimenting with notions of mimicry and mediation not as complicity, but as concepts of resistance, as applied to the original, colonial mediators of Macaulay, as well as the cultural translators of the contemporary scene, postcolonial writers? Bhabha's work in a sense attempts to reclaim the much maligned class of native-aliens, mimic-men and mediators, and restores the possibility of cultural translation and representation as acts of resistance and legitimate redefinition, complicating the links between authenticity and loyalty, mimicry and complicity, alienation and illegitimate power, that necessarily play a significant role in

postcolonial migrant identity, and the fiction that attempts to represent it.

Chapter I in this thesis, titled 'Immigrant Writer, Immigrant Community: The Rushdie Affair,' interprets the reception of *The Satanic Verses*, particularly by the Muslim Asian communities in the UK, and the conflicting definitions of Indian and Muslim authenticity, as well as political loyalty and accountability at its basis. *The Satanic Verses* can be defined in terms of its location in the tradition of mediation discussed above: a writer seen clearly as a native-alien with his privileged background and education, charged with various levels of inauthenticity (not a believer, therefore not an 'authentic Muslim,' has a privileged voice and persona, therefore not an authentic member of the homogeneously defined immigrant community) and of betrayal (representing an already beleaguered community and religion, in unflattering terms, to a mainstream readership poised to condemn, and moreover doing so by exploiting his intimate knowledge of the religion and community in question).

The condemnation that *The Satanic Verses* faced (if one were to overlook the considerable effect of the fatwa and the responses to it as acts of political manipulation) is intrinsically linked with the perceived position of its author: when Rushdie proclaims his intention to 'give fictional voice' to the immigrant Asian community in Britain, he is placing himself firmly as a descendant of Macaulay's mediators. The ambivalence of such a position of teller and interpreter of stories was one Rushdie had dealt with the portrayals of Saleem and Padma in *Midnight's Children*. The aftermath of the publication of *The Satanic Verses*, however, showed him to be still vulnerable to accusations of exploitation, elitism and alienation, and confused in his attempts to define the terms of his loyalty to the Muslim Asian community, either by citing mediator-like service done to the community (providing fictional voice, preparing anti-racist television

programs) or invoking a common bond in terms suspiciously close to the authenticity argument (asserting that Islam, to him, is family, especially after his ill-fated conversion).

Such ambivalence and confusion of terminology in describing an authorial relationship with the 'subaltern,' using Gayatri Spivak's term, is not exclusive to Rushdie. Bharati Mukherjee as well has undergone various strategic alterations of the terms she uses to define her authorial stance, from the self-confessed 'superiority' of her tone when discussing the plight of upper-class expatriates like herself, to the sophisticated use of diverse points of view in her short stories that chart an intricate mosaic of American voices on migration, to the more celebratory identification with a romanticised figure of immigrant in *Jasmine*. Her fiction flits between claustrophobic representations of characters caught in the 'dead space' of ghetto life in an early novel, *Wife*, and a celebration of frontier-pushing individualism, firmly in an American tradition of emancipation narratives in *Jasmine*. Her definitions of authorship, even when she is at her most strident in her manifestoes of immigrant writing, are conflicted and self-contradictory: having said that she will now celebrate the 'immigrant underclass,' her writing visits the ghetto only to represent it as a dead space to run away from; the 'fluid set of identities' that she had declared her intention to assume, and had assumed in her short stories, give way to the first person narrator in *Jasmine*, whose fluidity is in the series of identities she assumes and discards in quick succession, true to her creator's belief in representing Indianness 'only as metaphor.' Mukherjee's belief in the ethos of migration not as perpetual nostalgia for an increasingly idealised community of origin, but as a willed engagement with the country of arrival, has led her to create in *Jasmine* a character who is a 'true American because she is a romantic,' who believes in the

necessity of murdering past selves ‘in order to be born in the images of dreams.’ This has left, and will continue to leave Mukherjee vulnerable to accusations of assimilationism; she can be read both as a writer who engages most directly with immigration in representing an immigrant-heroine who is undergoing that very process, or one who is ultimately escapist, who in a book she claims to be providing ‘ashcan realism,’ only engages with foreignness as metaphor, and not as historically and politically constituted difference.

Hanif Kureishi engages with similar issues of representation and reception in his writing. His fiction has had to struggle with the knowledge that while he resists the mantle of mediator (once comparing that role to that of a ‘hired liar’ or public relations officer’) that seems to imply that he ought to be producing ‘positive images’ that would be of service to his community, he is aware of the power of representation. In an early play, *Borderlands*, the central character is a journalist, Susan, who decides to make a documentary on a London Sikh community with the best of intentions, but her journalistic intrusion proves to be not only naive, but ultimately misleading, exploitative and harmful as well. This figure of journalistic intrusion serves as a subtext in Kureishi’s later fiction. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* the central character, Karim, faces this dilemma for several reasons. As an actor in an experimental theatre company, he is asked to create and represent an Asian character on stage, but Karim does not feel the comfortable identification with ‘his own kind’ that is assumed; for instance he is half-English, and second generation, and is more at home with British markers of identity- class, accent, his taste in music, books, clothes, the fact that he is a suburban boy desperate to get out. His methods for gathering material for his characterisation are intrusive and exploitative, but also manipulated. Even when Karim does come to a partial understanding of the

moral difficulties of his position, he has little authority to alter his role in the production, his part in a play directed by an Englishman. Kureishi shares these preoccupations with a number of other second generation British Asian writers, such as Atima Srivastava and Farkhana Shaikh who have also created protagonists unsure of the ethics of their relationship with research subjects, discussing issues of race and class as part of the process of representation. In all three, representation is a means to a material end: Karim needs to create a good sketch to solidify his place in the theatre world; Angie is an up-and-coming television researcher, and Raisa is working towards a research degree. All three need to reconcile the individualism of their endeavour (with particularly Thatcherite tones in Kureishi and Srivastava's work) and their partial estrangement from native/immigrant identities, with the roles of representativeness that they find themselves in, willingly or unwillingly.

Midnight's Children dealt with an analogous dynamic within the context of India itself, with its creation of Saleem, a narrator both native and alien, who identified himself magically with the new India, but simultaneously sent signals of his awareness of his separation from it. The novel portrays an India that exists differently in different imaginations, dominant among whom is the imagination and political will of the colonial elite. This is the class background of Saleem himself, whose consciousness has been formed by Westernisation, who, like his grandfather, the German-educated Dr Aadam Aziz, sees India 'through travelled eyes.' This use of a privileged minority voice to represent the tenuous nationhood of India, showing its marginality as emblematic of Indianness itself, proved enabling for other Indian writers of Rushdie's generation, a trend that I refer to in Chapter IV: '*Midnight's Children*, and Its Travelling Descendants,' in order to place the internationalism of the Bengali writer and anthropologist, Amitav

Ghosh, in this context.

In his fiction that deals with the history and identity of the Bengal and Bengalis, Ghosh explores the blurring of identities in a way that does not correspond with new national and political boundaries, of the mixing of languages and histories in an India still haunted by the partition. Post-independence Indian diaspora, and the new definitions of Indianness it has created through travel and displacement, find echoes and sources in the post-partition Bengali context. This awareness of a partitioned and displaced Indian history finds its way into *In An Antique Land* as well, though in more roundabout ways, where it is layered with other journeys of resonant significance: in this juxtaposed account of anthropological research and travel writing, Ghosh explores his compromised subject position, as a postcolonial intellectual, who chooses to study a subject as suggestive as anthropology at the heart of the English educational establishment, at Oxford, then pursues fieldwork in a prime site of Orientalist inquiry, in Egypt. Once there, Ghosh carries his uncomfortable poise and distorted vision over the Indian ocean, following the footsteps of his research subject, back to India. Ghosh names this roundabout way of inquiring into one's own history and identity 'travelling in the West,' a posture that he suggests is representative of the state of the postcolonial intellectual, a concept comparable to Rushdie's representation of viewing India 'through travelled eyes.'

Chapter V focusses on the text of *The Satanic Verses* itself, examining its representations of postcolonial authorship, and its use of the figure of blasphemy as a new metaphor for the creation of postcolonial identity, as well as writing. A novel that presents itself as a blasphemous text, *The Satanic Verses* uses a confluence of the languages of sexual,

cultural, familial and religious betrayal, all defined through the figure of blasphemy. The novels represents the concept of blasphemy in a way that emphasises its simultaneity of intimacy and betrayal: a reference to a religion (or country, or native identity) of origin, even though it may be with the purpose of destroying, or more benignly, taking leave of such origins. In this framework, postcolonial authorship is both combative and reverential: Rushdie's novel, for instance, both pays tribute to, and wishes to destroy authenticity in the shape of orthodox Islam, and a religiously-conceived, nativist Indian identity, replacing them with a secular 'willing reinvention of self,' as postcolonial subject and intellectual. The exemplary self-positioning of its author, however, does not alter the reality and perception of his position of 'newfound power' and the backlash against the novel. This political and literary climate coloured not only the retrospective readings of *The Satanic Verses*, but the novels that came after its publication, into a scene dramatically different from the one Rushdie himself had created, with the earlier reception of *Midnight's Children*.

Romesh Gunesekera's 1994 Booker Prize nominee novel, *Reef*, starts and ends with images of confinement and futility.³ The novel is a long flashback that the narrator has one night at a petrol station in a nameless location in England. A late-night customer, Triton is stranded inside the service cubicle with a fellow Sri Lankan, who is unable to work the cash register - the two duck every time a car turns into the forecourt. While a drunk 'stumble[s] towards [them] in the dark' and starts 'hammering on the window' (pp.12-3), they have a disjointed conversation in broken English, since one is a Sinhala speaker, and the other a Tamil refugee. Triton's memory of growing up, a servant in an eccentric household in Sri Lanka, is not unlike this fleeting scene.

In many ways, *Reef* follows the tradition started by *Midnight's Children*, and followed by such novels as *The Great Indian Novel*, *The Memory of Elephants* and *The Circle of Reason*.⁴ It is a bildungsroman of sorts: it follows its young protagonist from the age of eleven, in '1962: the year of the bungled coup' (p.15), to adulthood in present-day England, where he is aware that the 'sea of pearls' of his memory has been transformed to 'a landmark for gunrunners in a battle zone of army camps and Tigers' (p.12). The isolated forecourt, as well as the eccentric household, are microcosmic of the embattled island, whose fragile coral reef is being eroded by the sea, and whose interior is erupting with incomprehensible forces of violence. To all of these, Triton is our sometimes naive, sometimes reticent witness, who tries to keep the strands of his world together by cooking ever more complicated dishes, first for Mister Salgado and Miss Nili in Sri Lanka, then for the 'bedraggled, cosmopolitan itinerants' (p.190) that line up outside his snack shop in Earls Court. *Reef* echoes Rushdie's novel as well in its use of a minor voice, and a minority household to reflect the history and the fate of a larger, but divided, nation: the tragic dissolution and destruction of the Salgado household and its elegant, open changeableness passes quiet judgment on the politics of Sri Lanka.

The tainting of *Reef* by *The Satanic Verses*, though perhaps more indirect, sets it apart from those novels that were modelled after *Midnight's Children*. *Reef* is steeped in a political fatalism that destroys and diminishes its characters, so that all they can manage, in the final sentence of the novel, is to chase 'after a glimmer of hope in a far-away house of sorrow' (p.190). But here politics is implicit rather than discussed. The delicacy of this sorrowful short novel is depoliticised: violence, though ever-present, is external to the Salgado household. Though the inhabitants of the large, bay-fronted house live in a world characterised by political, cultural and sexual confusion, they are cocooned by the

elegance of their habits, by Mister Salgado's passion for the reef, by Miss Nili's liveliness and sexual charisma, and by the creative outlet of Triton's cooking. In this household, the 'failed coup' is referred to, briefly and quietly, in 'language gently spoken,' 'as if it were some unseasonable rain' (p.17). Mister Salgado's language and his scientific imagination deal with movements larger than the local, political ones that are tearing Sri Lanka apart - faced with those, he is uncomprehending, lost. As a love affair flourishes and dies, and the ocean alternately presses in and retreats, news of violence barely invades the cocoon. As Triton sees it, 'in our house none of that mattered' (p.93). The elegant inward-looking of the household is echoed by the language and politics of the novel itself. Where *Midnight's Children* had used its child-narrator and its minority voice to allegorically confront the politics of the new-born, disjointed nation, *Reef* adopts the same devices to much more evasive ends. Perhaps it is the aftermath of the Rushdie affair that gives rise to such defensive finesse, and such a non-confrontational glance at political conflict.

Rushdie's own fictional output after the affair was similarly defensive. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* repeats many of the themes of *The Satanic Verses*, and defends the earlier book by rearticulating it as a song of innocence.⁵ Ostensibly a children's book written for the author's son, from whom he was separated because of his necessary hiding, it posits imagination, hope and love, over dogma, control and censorship. Storytelling is Rashid Khalifa's livelihood and life-source - it offers much-needed respite from the bleakness of the sad city that his family lives in, and it is the enigmatic power of these stories to change the world, and their uncontrollable variety that attracts the hostility of Khatam-Shud, the 'cultmaster,' the 'Arch-enemy of all Stories' (p.39). These portrayals, phrased in the idiom of the Arabian Nights, find echoes in the religious and political parables of *The Satanic Verses*, and preempt those of *The Moor's Last Sigh*.⁶ The cultmaster and his

assertion that 'the world is for Controlling' echo the Khomeini-like exiled Imam's monolithic vision of religion and a world dominated by it. The two characters also share an antipathy towards the creation of other worlds and world-visions:

Your world, my world, all worlds... they are all there to be Ruled. And inside every single story, inside every stream in the Ocean, there lies a world, a story-world, that I cannot Rule at all. And that is the reason why' (p.161).

The imaginative, almost literary nature of Salman Farsi's dissent and blasphemy against the monolithic words of religion and of despotic rule in the earlier novel is repeated by the tale of the storyteller's son, the Haroun of the title, and his quest to understand 'the use of stories that aren't even true' (p.22). As the young boy renews his faith in his father's stories, and protects the Ocean of Notions - a soup of stories where anything can happen, an intertextualist's fantasy where no story is pure and absolute - the father-and son-Khalifas return to their city and their restored family, where Rashid can once more speak of possible happy endings, even as the state factories continue manufacturing sadness.

Though the wistful echoes of both the text and the affair of *The Satanic Verses* are evident and well-discussed in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, their rearticulation in a children's book, set in a timeless time, with a protagonist who is not a satirist and a blasphemer but a confused child trying to reaffirm his faith in his father, defends the earlier novel by attempting to remove it to non-confrontational, self-deprecating terrain, where the issue of 'newfound power' may be sidestepped. With the much more adult *The*

Moor's Last Sigh Rushdie returns to India, an India of the recent past. Leaving the immediately confrontational political landscape of his immigrant trilogy, the novel studies the implications of rootedness in family and identity, and of artistic representation, discussed as both creativity and as destructiveness, in another context to *The Satanic Verses*, in other, convoluted parables of loyalty and betrayal.

Rushdie had defended the ending of *Midnight's Children* from the charge of pessimism by arguing that the form, and multi-layered voices ascribed to the novel a sense of regeneration, of teeming, unpredictable creativity, in which optimism could be found. His new novel gently and regretfully satirises even such cautioned hopefulness. Aadam Sinai, the prematurely-wise almost-son of Saleem in the earlier novel, 'who would grow up far tougher than the first [generation of midnight's children], not looking for their fate in prophecy or the stars, but forging it in the implacable furnaces of their wills' (p.447), had presented an undefined hope for the future. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Aadam appears in a different guise, where his hybridity, his adaptability and survival instinct do not make him into a symbol of hope, but of corruption: a business administrator, and employee of Moor's godfather-like father, Aadam speaks the language of business plans, of the creation of corporate spirit and profit. The 'new myths'(p.458) *Midnight's Children* had closed in the hope of are only created for corrupt business empires, and not a new democracy. The two versatile, plural and adaptable ideal new Indians of the novel, Aadam and Uma, are also its villains. The eclecticism of Zeeny Vakil, 'the pluralist philosophy on which we had all been raised,' is corrupted and defeated in Uma, and 'her multiple selves, her highly inventive commitment to the infinite malleability of the real, her modernistically provisional sense of truth' (*The Moor's Last Sigh*, p.272).

The novel, as well as revising *Midnight's Children*, functions as an apologia and a leavetaking, and tries to devise parables on shifting, uncertain political and artistic terrain. In Aurora Zogoiby, the mother-painter's quest for artistic voice and expression in changing political media, and the question-marks over her integrity, Rushdie perhaps presents not only interpretations of the 'affair,' but his writing as a whole. Aurora, too, has a creation that turns into 'an albatross,' after which she finds herself attacked and formulated. In *The Kissing of Abbas Ali Baig*, 'based on an actual incident,' Aurora jokingly re-pictures the fleeting kiss of a young woman spectator on the cheek of a Muslim cricketer in the middle of a match, as 'a full-scale Western-movie clinch' (p.228). The painting is attacked as an 'obscenity fit to be burned in the public square' (p.229), and it also inadvertently transforms the event in the public imagination, even eventually being used by Hindu nationalists to prove the Muslim threat on the virtue of 'patriotic Hindu girls' (p.230). Aurora is required to publicly defend her work, and its 'underlying motives,' obliged to 'counter accusations of social irresponsibility by diverse 'experts,' and increasingly finds 'how easily a self, a lifetime of work and action and affinity and opposition, could be washed away under such an attack!' (p.234).

Though *The Kissing* is presented as a coincidence, an accident of circumstance and timing that is used and abused for already increasingly communalist political purposes, Aurora's painting career and artistic stance is not without its questionable moments. In an earlier phase, she is Chipkali, 'an unblinking lizard on the wall of history, watching, watching' (pp.131-2). In this 'mimetic' stage, aiming to realistically represent the plight of the urban poor and oppressed as an act of solidarity, Aurora zooms 'around town in her chauffeur-driven Buick, into strike-actions, slum-cities and rum-dens, armed with her sketchbook... capturing history in charcoal' (pp.129-30). This caricature of the artist's

misguided and voyeuristic attempt at solidarity certainly adds weight to later charges of 'artistic irresponsibility,' and at least raises the spectre of accountability even when a specific piece is blatantly misappropriated.

Bharati Mukherjee's new novel, *The Holder of the World*, also takes a step back in history, perhaps surprising for a writer who had prided herself on capturing the contemporary moment in realistic fiction.⁷ The novel explores, as did Ghosh's *In An Antique Land*, for India an Egypt, a time when trade, travel and early colonial history made possible relationships different from those later prescribed and canonised by colonialism, and questions the originary myths of puritan America. A 'post-dated prequel' in the manner of Jean Rhys's elaboration of the colonial history that ought to have preceded *Jane Eyre*, Mukherjee's novel selects characters and atmosphere from *The Scarlet Letter*, and rewrites the originary moments of American history by complicating their New England claustrophobia with tales of travel, impurity and adventure. The sexual trespass that creates Pearl in Mukherjee's novel is much more transgressive than the priestly adultery that Hawthorne represents. Her 'White Pearl and Black Pearl' are Salem Bibi, a woman who was once the concubine of a Raja, and a captive in the Mughal court, and her half-Indian daughter, Pearl Singh, 'born in 1701 somewhere in the South Atlantic on the long voyage home' (p.284). The two find their niche in the margins of their bay colony, and become advocates of a free America. Openly airing 'seditious sentiments,' they are heard to mutter 'We are Americans to freedom born!' (p.285). When Nathaniel Hawthorne, born in Salem a hundred years later, writes his 'morbid introspection into guilt and repression that many call our greatest work,' time has allowed 'local understudies to learn their foreign lines,' (p.286) and the colonial, international, hybrid and foreign histories that went into the making of what is quintessentially

American, have been erased and forgotten.

Mukherjee here seems to have tired of the 'ashcan realism' that she argued her American fiction offered, and extends the parameters of the scientific analogies she used in *Jasmine*. *The Holder of the World* is her first foray into magic realism, towards its science fiction end, deployed in a fashion comparable to Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants*. The narrator, an American 'asset-hunter,' is searching for a lost diamond, 'the Emperor's tear,' that she believes an earlier new Englander, Hannah Easton, also known as the 'Salem Bibi,' brought back to Salem with her. To solve the mystery of the lost jewel, and further her identification with her 17th century compatriot, Beigh eventually uses the virtual-reality software that her Indian scientist lover, 'Venn Iyer, father of fractals and designer of inner space' (p.19), created, thus implanting and recreating in her, a new American memory.

Beigh Masters is one of Mukherjee's convoluted and compromised voices: as an asset-hunter, she follows a tradition of colonialist ransacking; as a woman, she identifies with an earlier female traveller, whose story, *Heat and Dust*-like, she is trying to uncover; she is a white American exploring a bygone age in India, but her vision of the place is made possible and filtered through the computerised aid of her Indian scientist lover. Her vision 'slalom[s] between *us* and *them*, imagining *our* wonder and *their* dread, now as a freebooter from colonial Rehoboth or Marblehead, and now as a Hindu King or Mughal emperor watching the dawn of a dreadful future through the prism of a single perfect ruby' (p.13).

The American emphases of her fiction perhaps remove Mukherjee from the specific

stresses that establish the plight of UK-based writers of Subcontinental origin, and the political conundrums they must directly face, or evasively avoid. Or perhaps, after the gritty 'ashcan realism' of *Middleman* and its confrontation with the 'unassimilated underclass,' as Mukherjee puts it, her imagination is now captured by stories on more epic scales. Her work functions to a different political impetus, also, because the nation for which she wishes to create 'new myths' is America, where the melting-pot needs to be not created, but excavated from a buried past.

Hanif Kureishi's latest novel, *The Black Album*, is poised on the turning point of the eruption after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.⁸ At the start of the novel, 'that book' has already been published, but the backlash is yet to come, its intensity a surprise even to those directly involved. Shahid Hasan leaves Kent for London and starts college at that particular time in 1989, and his cultural confusion carries echoes of the earlier, unnamed novel, as well as of the reaction to it.

Shahid believes in fun, music, literature and intellectual stimulation - all this he hopes life in London will offer him, saving him from a profit-and-loss bound life working at the travel agency of his parents, and the cocaine-induced haze that his older brother Chili is losing himself in. But Shahid is also lost and lonely, a suburban Asian boy so muddled that he once tried to be a racist and join the British National Party. Such confusion leads him to two opposing saviours: Deedee Osgood, college lecturer who teaches a course on colonialism and literature; and brother Riaz, the enigmatic leader of the Muslim group Shahid gets involved with, composed of a raggle-taggle of Asian students, ex-drug-dealers and restaurant workers. Lonely in London, Shahid is in search of a fuller life and interesting people, which both Deedee and Riaz offer, one with her intellectual vigour,

sexual daring and emotional neediness, and the other with his spiritual certainty, race activism and group spirit. Shahid is drawn into this cult-like clique even though he is aware of his basic lack of religious belief, and his two worlds coexist uneasily until the book-burnings are brought to campus, and Deedee and Riaz end up in direct confrontation. Though everyday reality is a let-down after the heights of religion and drug-use, Shahid eventually accepts Deedee's explanation that 'most novels, like most lives, could be titled *Lost Illusions*. Isn't that what happened to you?' (p.133).

The Black Album and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, like *The Buddha of Suburbia* and *Midnight's Children* before them, end in notes of deferred hope. Though Kureishi's novel attempts to confront the cultural impasse of the Rushdie affair, its politics are stunted. There is an open-ended abruptness to the ending of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, and its lively, if partial assertion of life and family, and its stated hope of living more deeply in the future. The later novel, in contrast, ends on a drawn-out, despondent note. After the confrontation with Riaz's group dies down, Shahid and Deedee drift across the English landscape, listlessly deciding to follow the 'new adventure' of their relationship, 'until it stops being fun' (p.230).

'A last sigh for a lost world, a tear for its passing' (p.4) is how its narrator describes *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Despite such lyrical sweetness, the novel is aware of its destruction of a genre. Moor is destined to sleep, perhaps to die, in captivity in Mooristan, the 'palimpsestine' house in Spain that has been modelled by his captor after Aurora's paintings, her depiction of an idealised, illusory, changing world, a golden, imaginary homeland. Having lost count of the days spent in captivity, Moor thinks back over the betrayals and banishments of his life, but is unable to locate the guilty party. He resolves,

when he has finished telling his story, to 'close my eyes, according to our family's odd practice of falling asleep in times of trouble, and hope to awaken, renewed and joyful, into a better time' (p.434).

The Moor's Last Sigh is perhaps a tear for the passing of the proliferation of possibilities that *Midnight's Children* celebrated. Where the earlier novel had feared annihilation by fragmentation into millions of teeming voices, the later novel represents the silencing of one voice. The bitter and accusatory notes of the Rushdie affair have not yet lifted from politics, or from literature. It can only be hoped that the 'newfound power' that Dirlik suggested had to be negotiated by third world writers and intellectuals alike will not result in silence.

NOTES

1. Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,' *Critical Inquiry* 20, 2 (Winter 1994), pp.328-56 (p.339).
2. Thomas Babington Macaulay, 'Minute on Indian Education,' *Selected Writings*, ed. John Clive (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), p.249.
3. Romesh Gunsekera, *Reef* (London: Granta in Association with Penguin, 1994). Further references are in the text.
4. Shashi Tharoor, *The Great Indian Novel* (London: Viking, 1989), Boman Desai, *The Memory of Elephants* (London: Deutch, 1988), Amitav Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason* (London: Hamilton, 1986).
5. Salman Rushdie, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (London: Granta in Association with Penguin, 1990). Further references are in the text.
6. Salman Rushdie, *The Moor's Last Sigh* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995). Further references are in the text.
7. Bharati Mukherjee, *The Holder of the World* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993). Further references are in the text.
8. Hanif Kureishi, *The Black Album* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995). Further references are in the text.

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